THE
PEACE &
SECURITY
MONITOR

The Indo-Pacific

Issue 5 | June 2025

PLATFORM
FOR PEACE AND HUMANITY

Project Coordinator
Lysiane Haefelin

Editors
Lysiane Haefelin
Mohamed Bennour

Authors
Kirsten Griffiths
Robert Sutton
Kalara Perera
Ojus Tyagi
Esm'eralda Marion
Kedar Bhasme
Phoo Wai Yan Myint

Table of Contents

Foreword

As we enter the middle of 2025, the convergence of humanitarian crises, technological transformation, and persistent conflicts has created a complex landscape where traditional security paradigms are being tested and redefined. This issue of The Peace & Security Monitor examines seven critical dimensions of these evolving challenges.

The humanitarian crisis facing Rohingya refugees and Afghan returnees has reached a critical juncture, with American aid cuts creating unprecedented pressure on vulnerable populations dependent on international assistance.

Meanwhile, long-simmering insurgencies continue to extract a devastating toll; from Pakistan's Balochistan resistance movement to Thailand's escalating southern violence.

The fragility of regional peace was starkly demonstrated by the April 2025 Kashmir attack, which reignited India-Pakistan tensions and threatened years of diplomatic progress.

The broader security architecture is undergoing fundamental transformation as nations recalibrate strategic partnerships and defence postures. Shifting alliances and increasing militarisation reflect both responses to perceived threats and the pursuit of new influence, reshaping traditional balance-of-power calculations across South and Southeast Asia.

China's technological ascendancy, epitomised by developments like DeepSeek AI, is reshaping regional data governance and surveillance capabilities, creating new frontiers where privacy rights, state security, and economic innovation intersect.

Natural disasters continue to expose institutional fragility, as Myanmar's devastating earthquake revealed how disaster response has become another battlefield in the country's ongoing conflict.

Each crisis feeds into others, creating cascading effects that require coordinated regional and international attention. As the Indo-Pacific becomes increasingly central to global calculations, understanding these security challenges becomes essential for policymakers, researchers, and advocates working toward sustainable peace.

The authors in this issue provide essential analysis and policy recommendations that acknowledge both the urgency of current crises and the need for long-term approaches.

Rohingya Refugees and Afghan Returnees: Navigating Aid Cuts and Migration Pressures

Kirsten Griffiths

Key Takeaways

- Before the foreign aid cuts, the United States was the largest provider of aid to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Afghanistan's largest donor, and a major donor to Afghan refugees in Pakistan. These cuts will lead to an enormous increase in humanitarian needs, particularly regarding livelihoods, health, food security, and nutrition in Afghanistan and the host communities for Afghan and Rohingya refugees.

- The forced return of Afghan and Rohingya refugees jeopardises the lives of returnees and contravenes the principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law. The host countries therefore need to immediately end their restrictive regimes for refugees and comply with their international obligations.

The Indo-Pacific region has witnessed a rise in refugees due to escalating conflicts, human rights abuses and climate disasters. International donors have provided humanitarian aid with the US historically funding a high proportion. In 2024, the US disbursed about US$7 billion in foreign aid to South Asia, Central Asia, East Asia and Oceania.[1] With humanitarian crises in the region not stabilising, refugees being forcefully repatriated and the looming threat of US aid cuts under the Trump administration, many lives are under serious threat.

More than one million Rohingya refugees live in Cox's Bazar, the world's largest refugee settlement. Despite humanitarian assistance from the Government of Bangladesh and the international community, the complex needs are immense and durable solutions are uncertain. The Rohingya endure restrictions that limit their movement, access to housing and work outside the camps, making them dependent on aid. These restrictions also lead to vulnerabilities such as trafficking and irregular migration.[2] The funding cuts from the US, which was previously the largest donor for the Rohingya refugee response, come at a time when the camps already need more funding and resources.

The US has also been the largest humanitarian aid donor to Afghanistan since 2013 and was committed to meeting life-sustaining and life-saving needs in the country. The US was the largest contributor to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan in 2024 by providing US$736.6 million which amounted to 45 per cent of total funding requested.[3] Funding from the US and other donors enabled humanitarian responders in Afghanistan to reach 20.4 million people in 2024 with at least one form of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian operations have already been significantly affected, and this is likely to worsen after the decision on 4 April 2025 to suspend all remaining US aid to Afghanistan (which totalled US$562 million). Without this funding from the US, several million less people will receive assistance in 2025. 7.3 million people received at least one type of humanitarian support as of the end of February 2025, compared to 8.6 million at the same time in 2024.[4]

Since September 2023, more than 3 million Afghans have returned from neighbouring countries.[5] 780,000 are estimated to have returned in 2025 alone, including 351,600

who were deported.[6] The mass returns from Pakistan and Iran can be primarily attributed to policies and pressures from the host countries, such as Pakistan's Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP) to remove foreign nationals, including Afghans. Returnees face an uncertain future as half of the population in-country already requires humanitarian assistance for their basic needs. With high levels of food insecurity and poverty combined with human rights violations and overstretched services and infrastructure in Afghanistan, the mass returns and funding cuts risk further destabilising the country and leading to endless cycles of displacement.[7] Therefore, this article will examine the impact of the US aid cuts and the international climate that is unfavourable towards Rohingya refugees in South and Southeast Asia and the displacement of Afghan refugees.

Families are relocated because of flooding and landslides in the Balukhali Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh (Allison Joyce for UN Women 2019)

Rohingya Refugees in South and Southeast Asia

In August 2017, massive scale violence, armed attacks, and serious human rights violations led to thousands of Rohingya fleeing their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Now, more than one million Rohingya refugees are living in the Cox's Bazar region. The Rohingya have been described by the United Nations as "the most persecuted minority in the world."[8] Inside Myanmar, the humanitarian situation has deteriorated further since February 2021 due to political upheaval and increased conflict within the country. This has resulted in thousands of refugees seeking safety in neighbouring countries. The majority of the Rohingya are currently displaced in Bangladesh (1,133,981), with smaller numbers in Malaysia (111,700), India (23,300), Indonesia (2,600) and Thailand (500).[9] These countries are struggling with the long-term impact of hosting Rohingya refugees including the strain on resources, social tensions and economic pressures.

The US has been the largest provider of aid to the Rohingya refugees, contributing more than US$2.5 billion since 2017, including more than US$2.1 billion in Bangladesh.[10] According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 95% of Rohingya households in Cox's Bazar depend on humanitarian assistance.[11] More than half of the refugees in the Cox's Bazar camps are younger than 18 and have limited opportunities for skills-building, education, and livelihoods.[12]

The 1951 International Convention relating to the Status of Refugees ('1951 Refugee Convention') and its 1967 Protocol are the key legal documents that protect refugees. However, the countries hosting Rohingya refugees, including Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Indonesia, have not ratified these agreements.[13] Despite this, Bangladesh is party to other major international protection agreements such as the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention

against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).[14] These other international human rights instruments contain many of the same rights that are enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. For example, Article 3(1) of the UNCAT states that no State Party shall expel, return ("refouler") or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture. In addition, under Article 5(a) of the CERD, State parties are obligated to ensure equality before the law, including equal treatment before judicial organs.[15]

Afghan Returnees from Pakistan and Iran

The Taliban's takeover of Kabul in 2021 triggered one of the largest refugee crises of the century. Millions of Afghans, fearing economic collapse and persecution, fled to neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan. The situation has worsened over time due to political, economic, and environmental factors and a shortage of sufficient international support.[16] UNHCR has reported that approximately 600,000 Afghans arrived in Pakistan since August 2021.[17]

UNHCR has maintained a non-return advisory for Afghanistan since August 2021, reaffirmed in February 2023 in the Guidance Note on International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan; Update 1.[18] This advisory calls for a halt on forced returns of Afghan nationals.[19] However, forced returns continue under the current Taliban regime due to growing stigmatisation and tension in Pakistan.

Iran and Pakistan currently host 3.75 million and 1.75 million Afghans respectively, even though these countries face their own challenges.[20] Since 2023, there has been a shift in displacement trends amid growing anti-Afghan sentiments in these host countries. On 26 September 2023, the Government of Pakistan announced an "Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan" to deport "illegal" foreigners residing in the country, most of whom are Afghans. The Plan imposed a 30-day deadline for "undocumented" Afghan nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers, to leave the country or be subjected to deportation, putting millions at risk.[21] UNHCR estimates that since September 2023, more than 3 million Afghans have returned or been deported from the two countries, including over 1.5 million in 2024.[22]

The US has continued to be Afghanistan's largest aid donor despite withdrawing troops and other officials from the country in August 2021.[23] Between 2010 and 2020, Pakistan received approximately US$2.5 billion in US Agency for International Development (USAID) funding in healthcare, humanitarian assistance, infrastructure, economic growth and education programmes.[24] Since 2002, the US has provided over US$273 million in humanitarian assistance for Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Pakistani host communities. In 2022 alone, the US provided nearly US$60 million to assist refugees in Pakistan.[25]

Hundreds of thousands of Afghans face harsh return after expulsion from Pakistan. Afghanistan, Torkham crossing point, border with Pakistan (Sayed Habib Bidell for UN Women 2023)

Afghanistan and Iran are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, while Pakistan is a non-signatory. Afghanistan and Iran are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, while Pakistan is a non-signatory. All three countries are parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and are obligated under Article 22 to tailor their refugee and asylum policies to the unique needs of these children.[26] Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan are also signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, which grants people the right to seek refuge and asylum and outlines fundamental rights regardless of status. All three countries have ratified the ICCPR, which contains many of the fundamental rights which are outlined in the UDHR. As a signatory to the ICCPR, these countries are required to establish a mechanism ensuring the adequate provision of civil and political rights. This acts as a deterrent against any inhuman treatment of refugees in these countries. Furthermore, the UNCAT, which Pakistan and Afghanistan have ratified, mandates states to uphold non-refoulement and prevent inhuman abuse. In addition, all three countries ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which provides all citizens with inherent human rights such as work, health facilities, and social security.[27]

Security Concerns in Host Countries and of Forced Returns of Refugees

Refugees are perceived by host countries as posing a security danger by placing more demands on their limited resources or by merely being present.[28] Host countries' governments are justifying deportation by pushing a narrative that refugees are posing a security danger.

Hundreds of thousands of Afghans face harsh return after expulsion from Pakistan. Afghanistan, Torkham crossing point, border with Pakistan (Sayed Habib Bidell for UN Women 2023)

Violence and security incidents inside the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar have increased since the beginning of 2022, leading to protection concerns, such as exposure to insecurity, child-related protection concerns, and gender-based violence.[29] The lack of educational and livelihood opportunities compound these protection issues along with funding cuts that worsen the food insecurity situation for the Rohingya refugees. Consequently, many refugees have undertaken dangerous maritime journeys to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

In addition, the overcrowding in camps increases the likelihood of violence and crime.[30] In 2024 alone, approximately 80,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh, joining more than a million others in the overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar.[31] On 4 April 2025, Myanmar authorities announced that 180,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh were "eligible" for repatriation. However, due to the ongoing instability, forced conscription, and fragmented governance in Myanmar, the prospect of a safe and voluntary return does not seem likely.[32] Despite this, research by Fortify Rights found that Border Guard Bangladesh forces were

responsible for beating and pushing back over 300 Rohingya refugees to Myanmar in February and March 2024 in six incidents.[33]

In India, the arrival of Rohingya refugees is regarded as a threat to its national security. There are reports that Rohingya refugees are being used by different agencies and allegedly have connections with terrorist organisations based in Pakistan.[34] In 2023, an Intel report indicated that the Rohingya community took part in anti-India activities and had connections with terrorist organisations such as ISIS and Pakistani Intelligence agency ISI.[35]

The Rohingya in India have faced increased harassment since February 2025 and have been detained across India in recent days, adding to the hundreds who are already held in detention. At least 40 Rohingya refugees have been deported from India to Myanmar and another 50 pushed into Bangladesh since early May.[36] The United Nations has called for an investigation into credible reports that Rohingya refugees were forced off an Indian navy vessel and into the Andaman Sea in May 2025. Tom Andrews, the United Nations' (UN) special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, has urged the Government of India to refrain from inhumane and life-threatening treatment of Rohingya refugees, including their repatriation into perilous conditions in Myanmar.[37]

Iran has long served as a host country for Afghans escaping conflict and instability. However, over time, Iran's approach has grown more restrictive, driven by security concerns and economic strains.[38] Although mechanisms, including the Amayesh card system and the Conditional Protection Preparation Process, provide documentation and limited legal protection to Afghans, they also limit refugees to certain occupations, ban them from no-go areas, and constrain their access to public services. Further, these systems have resulted in 500,000 Afghans not having legal status.[39] By 2024, Iranian authorities deported 750,000 Afghans and announced millions of deportations for 2025, citing security and economic issues, such as scarcity of food rations and alleged records of murders and rapes committed by refugees.[40]

On 26 September 2023, the Government of Pakistan announced plans to repatriate illegal foreigners under its IFRP. The Pakistan government cited security concerns by claiming that Afghan nationals were involved in violent attacks on Pakistan that Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) takes responsibility for.[41] They revealed that 14 of 24 suicide bombings in the country in 2023 were carried out by Afghan nationals.[42] Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti announced a deadline of November 1 stating that all illegal immigrants should leave voluntarily or be subjected to forcible expulsion after that date.[43] The IFRP has been implemented since 1 November 2023, with intermittent pauses. In March 2025, authorities issued a notification advising undocumented Afghan nationals and Afghan Citizen card holders to voluntarily leave the country by 31 March 2025, and deportations will start from 1 April 2025.[44] In the aftermath of this decision, the UN has identified an incremental increase in spontaneous returns and deportations of Afghans.[45]

Afghan refugees: The path home (Pierre Prakash for the European Union/ECHO 2016)

A total of 842,429 Afghan nationals returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan between November 2023 and March 2025. Of these, 40,677 individuals were deported, while 51,196 returned voluntarily.[46] According to UNHCR, over 250,000 Afghans returned in April alone. This number included 96,000 who were forcibly deported.[47] "Afghan nationals including refugees and asylum seekers in Pakistan have been living in a state of fear since the Pakistani authorities announced their phased deportation plans in October 2023," said Babu Ram Pant from Amnesty International. "Their lives stand to be completely upended as a result of the Pakistan government's insistence on violating their obligations under international human rights law, specifically the principle of non-refoulement."[48]

Humanitarian Impacts of Diminished International Support

The potential impacts of diminished international support for the Afghan and Rohingya refugees and their host countries include exacerbating the vulnerability of refugees, such as their ability to meet basic needs and secure fundamental human rights. Other impacts include an escalation of tensions in the region, which would also lead to increased displacement, crime and violence due to vulnerabilities, and reduced resilience to the climate crisis.

The large-scale returns to Afghanistan, combined with the severe funding cuts, have put considerable pressure on Afghanistan's overstretched resources and services and hampered reintegration efforts, resulting in risks of secondary and new displacement, including movements back into Iran and Pakistan.[49] According to UNHCR spokesperson Babar Baloch, the arrival of more than a quarter of a million Afghans from Pakistan and Iran in one month alone threatened to push Afghanistan into "an even deeper humanitarian crisis" and that "forcing or putting pressure on Afghans to return is unsustainable and could destabilise the region."[50]

The current humanitarian funding crisis, which is aggravated by declining health spending in host countries, adversely affects the scope and quality of public health and nutrition programmes for refugees and their host communities.[51] Pio Smith from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), raised concerns that millions of women and girls now faced life-threatening risks due to the lack of access to UNFPA's crucial services across Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh.[52] UNFPA requires over US$308 million in 2025 to sustain critical services in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh.[53] "In the Asia Pacific, UNFPA had suspended 53.7 million United States dollars' worth of project funding that was due from the United States State Department and a further 24 million dollars that had been received from USAID. The United States was one of the largest contributors for UNFPA's humanitarian aid across the world," said UNFPA[54]

Table 1 - Impacts of suspension of aid funding from the US[55]

Country	Number of people affected	Impact on health services
Afghanistan	More than 9 million people	Affected communities would lose access to health and protection services, and nearly 600 mobile health teams, family health centres and counselling centres would be suspended.
Pakistan	1.7 million people, including 1.2 million Afghan refugees	The closure of health facilities would deprive people of access to lifesaving sexual and reproductive health services.
Bangladesh	Almost 600,000 people, including Rohingya refugees	Access to essential maternal and reproductive health services would be curtailed.

In Bangladesh, the impact of the funding cuts on the health sector could lead to about one million Rohingya refugees facing a severe health crisis, threatening access to essential medical services.[56] Unless immediate financial support is provided, thousands of lives are severely threatened by a collapse of healthcare systems in the refugee camps. Since the US has historically been one of the largest donors to the Rohingya response, the aid cuts have created a ripple effect. It has forced humanitarian organisations to scale back essential programmes and pursue alternative funding sources. Local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and implementing partners have been required to prioritise immediate survival needs, such as health or food programmes, instead of longer-term development and self-reliance initiatives.[57] The funding cuts have affected both host communities and refugees by further complicating Bangladesh's ability to manage the refugee situation. This has resulted in increased pressure on local resources and infrastructure, particularly in Cox's Bazar. The refugee camps face significant challenges in sanitation, healthcare and emergency management. Bangladeshi officials and Rohingya refugees are concerned that aid cuts could worsen hunger, fuel crime and curtail critical healthcare, while increasing the risks of human trafficking and radicalisation. The Inter-Sector Coordination Group said about 300,000 refugees have already faced disruptions in healthcare services.[58]

In Pakistan, 39 projects worth US$845 million across various sectors including agriculture, energy, economic development, education, governance, health, and humanitarian aid have been suspended.[59] At the end of February 2025, Community World Service Asia reported the following impacts in Pakistan just one month after the USAID cuts: 22 organisations working on education, democracy, advocacy and minority rights were directly affected, resulting in project closures; US$845 million in aid projects were suspended; seven million people lost access to lifesaving sexual and reproductive health services; two million Afghan refugees were cut off from lifesaving health services; and 60 health facilities were closed.[60]

Role of Non-Western Donors

Before the aid cuts, the US alone funded 40% of global humanitarian aid.[61] Together, the US, Germany, the European Union and the United Kingdom provide nearly 65% of global humanitarian assistance.[62] The Trump administration's decision to cut 83% of programmes run by USAID has further accelerated a broader decline in funding from traditional donors.[63] In 2025, the UK, Germany, Belgium, France, Sweden and Switzerland have all announced cuts to international cooperation budgets.

According to experts interviewed by SWI swissinfo.ch, only China or some Gulf countries,

Food distribution (Anna Dubuis for FCDO 2017)

such as Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates (UAE), could offset the loss of the funding from the US.[64] Tammam Aloudat, CEO of The New Humanitarian, said, "BRICS countries are looking for recognition, they want to expand, and they are looking for independence." Humanitarian aid can therefore act as a tool of soft power by enabling donor states to promote a positive image of themselves, increase geopolitical influence and win favour with recipient countries, especially in UN votes.[65]

Following the closure of thousands of USAID-funded projects, it has been reported by international media that China has stepped in to provide similar programmes in countries such as Nepal, Cambodia and Rwanda. However, China may be restricted by its own domestic economic challenges, particularly in the real estate sector. Also it is not yet clear whether China is interested in contributing significantly to the UN's humanitarian aid system.[66]

Other non-Western countries seeking to increase their influence in Southeast Asia and support refugees would need to step up. This includes Japan, South Korea and India. In comparison with the US, Japan already provides more than three times the amount of development assistance to Southeast Asia.[67] In February 2025, the Government of Japan announced that it has allocated US$3.2 million to support the World Health Organisation's (WHO) efforts in Bangladesh to reduce morbidity and preventable mortality among the Rohingya refugees and host community in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char.[68] These aid cuts will prompt refugee host countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Iran to turn to other funders. Before the fall of Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh had developed very close economic and strategic relations with China and maintained generally friendly links with India.[69] Therefore, these donors could collectively fill some of the funding gap for Rohingya and Afghan refugees in Asia.

Conclusion

Although the host countries for Rohingya and Afghan refugees should be acknowledged for their efforts to support both displaced populations for long periods of time, restrictive policies towards refugees and forced repatriation are alarming and could breach international law. The forced repatriation may violate the principle of non-refoulement, which is binding under customary international law if refugees are forcibly repatriated to countries where they face persecution or harm.[70] In addition, the large-scale returns from Pakistan to Afghanistan could worsen an already dire humanitarian situation as the conditions in Afghanistan are not conducive for sustainable return and reintegration of large numbers of returnees, amid a struggling economy with high levels of malnutrition and millions of internally displaced people.[71]

Both populations are heavily dependent on humanitarian aid, especially from the US. The US aid cuts came at a time when humanitarian needs were immense in the region and have already significantly impacted refugees and their host communities. The suspension of many aid projects has led to the closure of health clinics and refugees losing access to life-saving health services. There are concerns that aid cuts could also lead to increased crime rates, worsen hunger, and heighten the risks of human trafficking and radicalisation in refugee camps and host communities.[72] Therefore, the host countries for Rohingya and Afghan refugees urgently require humanitarian funding from the international community to support the refugees in their countries and to comply with their international obligations.

Uganda is an example of a country which has been described as being one of the friendliest countries in the world for refugees. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) stated that Uganda, which hosts the highest number of refugees in Africa, is a "pioneer in integrating and giving them full rights".[73] In addition, UNHCR noted that Uganda's Refugee Act 2006 "unquestionably constitutes the most progressive refugee law in Africa."[74] Thus, other countries could adopt less restrictive policies like Uganda that allow refugees to enjoy freedom of movement, access to health services and education, and perform livelihood activities such as doing business or farming.

Policy Recommendations

- Humanitarian organisations and host countries should explore alternative funding models in order to deliver critical services to Afghan and Rohingya refugees. This might include pursuing funding from other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as China, Korea, Australia and Japan, and private sector partnerships and foundations.

- The Governments of Pakistan and Iran should immediately cease forcibly repatriating refugees to Afghanistan in line with their international legal obligations, including the principle of non-refoulement. The Governments should also pass human rights-compliant law protecting the rights of refugees in Pakistan and Iran. Furthermore, Pakistan should ratify the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees along with its Protocols.[75]

- The Government of India should immediately end the detention and forced deportation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. Repatriations place their lives at risk due to the ongoing conflict in Myanmar and contravenes India's obligations under international law.[76]

- The Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar should collectively establish a longer-term repatriation plan that ensures safe returns, and mediation from the UN, ASEAN and other countries.

- Humanitarian organisations and host communities should ensure that the affected communities are meaningfully engaged in decision-making and that their rights and dignity are respected when services are designed and provided to them.

Endnotes

1 Ramos M, 'Powerful Asian countries will struggle to fill aid gap left by US' (Context by Thomson Reuters Foundation, 19 March 2025) https://www.context.news/money-power-people/powerful-asian-countries-will-struggle-to-fill-aid-gap-left-by-us accessed 5 June 2025.

2 'Bangladesh Appeal 2025: Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis' (IOM, 15 April 2025) https://bangladesh.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1006/files/iom-appeal-2025_version-4.0-high-res.pdf accessed 18 May 2025.

3 'Afghanistan: Impact of US Funding Suspension on the Humanitarian Response (As of 22 Apr 2025)' (OCHA, 23 April 2025) https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-impact-us-funding-suspension-humanitarian-response-22-apr-2025 accessed 18 May 2025.

4 Ibid.

5 'UNHCR: Mass returns push Afghanistan to brink as aid dwindles' (UNHCR, 20 May 2025) https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-mass-returns-push-afghanistan-brink-aid-dwindles accessed 19 May 2025.

6 Ibid.

7 'UNHCR response and requirements - Afghan returns from Pakistan & Iran - 1 May 2025' (UNHCR, 2 May 2025) https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/116053 accessed 20 May 2025.

8 'Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained' (UNHCR, 22 August 2024) https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/ accessed 20 May 2025.

9 'Myanmar Situation' (UNHCR, 22 May 2025) https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar accessed 22 May 2025.

10 'United States Announces New Funding for Rohingya Refugees and Host Communities' (The United States Government, 24 September 2024) https://bd.usembassy.gov/united-states-announces-new-funding-for-rohingya-refugees-and-host-communities/ accessed 22 May 2025.

11 'Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained' (UNHCR, 22 August 2024) https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/ accessed 20 May 2025.

12 Ibid.

13 'APRRN Advocacy Briefer-Strategizing for Rohingya Refugee Protection and Durable Solutions' (Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, 15 May 2025) https://www.aprrn.org/publication-detail/83/ accessed 20 May 2025.

14 'Bangladesh: Analysis of Gaps in the Protection of Rohingya Refugees' (UNHCR, May 2007) https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/46fa1af32.pdf accessed 20 May 2025.

15 Hasan M and Reza A, 'Evaluating Bangladesh's Legal Framework for Rohingya Refugees: Gaps and Solutions' (EJIL:Talk! Blog of the European Journal of International Law, 10 January 2025) https://www.ejiltalk.org/evaluating-bangladeshs-legal-framework-for-rohingya-refugees-gaps-and-solutions accessed 5 June 2025.

16 Thapar M and Shekhawat S, 'Afghan refugees in 2025: The far-reaching impact of US aid cuts' (Observer Research Foundation, 4 March 2025) https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/afghan-refugees-in-2025-the-far-reaching-impact-of-us-aid-cuts accessed 20 May 2025.

17 'Afghan Nationals Return from Pakistan - April 2025 - DREF Operation MDRPK027' (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 25 April 2025) https://go-api.ifrc.org/api/downloadfile/90952/MDRPK027do accessed 20 May 2025.

18 'Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Afghanistan (Update I)' (UNHCR, February 2023) https://www.refworld.org/policy/countrypos/unhcr/2023/en/124216 accessed 18 May 2025.

19 'Briefing Notes: UNHCR issues a non-return advisory for Afghanistan' (UNHCR, 17 August 2021) https://www.unhcr.org/au/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-issues-non-return-advisory-afghanistan accessed 20 May 2025.

20 'UNHCR response and requirements - Afghan returns from Pakistan & Iran - 1 May 2025' (UNHCR, 2 May 2025) https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/116053 accessed 20 May 2025.

21 'Pakistan: 'Treat us like human beings': Afghans in Pakistan at risk of unlawful deportation' (Amnesty International, 4 April 2025) https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/9217/2025/en/ accessed 18 May 2025.

22 'UNHCR response and requirements - Afghan returns from Pakistan & Iran - 1 May 2025' (UNHCR, 2 May 2025) https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/116053 accessed 20 May 2025.

23 Thomas C, 'Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief' (Congress.gov, 7 March 2025) https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45122 accessed 20 May 2025.

24 'Trump's USAID shutdown pushes 1.7 million people in Pakistan into crisis' (European AIDS Treatment Group, 11 February 2025) https://www.eatg.org/hiv-news/trumps-usaid-shutdown-pushes-1-7-million-people-in-pakistan-into-crisis/ accessed 19 May 2025.

25 'United States Provided Nearly $60 Million in 2022 for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan and Pakistani Host Communities' (The United States Government, 5 January 2023) https://pk.usembassy.gov/united-states-provided-nearly-60-million-in-2022-for-afghan-refugees-in-pakistan-and-pakistani-host-communities/ accessed 19 May 2025.

26 'UNCRC Article 22: Refugee children in Australia and abroad' (Save the Children) https://www.savethechildren.org.au/about-us/save-the-childrens-charity-work/uncrc-article-22-refugee-

children-in-australia accessed 5 June 2025.

27 Omeed B and Zulfiqar U, 'Rethinking the Significance of Refugee Laws for Pakistan' (2024) 51 Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research Perspectives https://cscr.pk/pdf/perspectives/Rethinking-the-Significance-of-Refugee-Laws-for-Pakistan.pdf accessed 5 June 2025.

28 Sharma P, 'Rohingya Refugees in India: Analysis of the Perceived Security Threats' (International Affairs Forum, 8 August 2023) https://www.ia-forum.org/Content/ViewInternal_Document.cfm?contenttype_id=0&ContentID=9639 accessed 19 May 2025.

29 'Bangladesh: Rising violence, insecurity, and protection concerns in Cox's Bazar refugee camps' (ACAPS, 12 May 2023) https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20230512_acaps_briefing_note_bangladesh_rising_violence_insecurity_and_protection_concerns_in_coxs_bazar_refugee_camps_0.pdf accessed 5 June 2025.

30 'Echoes of violence in the Rohingya camps of Cox's Bazar' (Médecins Sans Frontières, 4 December 2024) https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/echoes-violence-rohingya-camps-coxs-bazar accessed 20 May 2025.

31 Faisal A, Khaled and Ansar A, 'Myanmar's Rakhine State at a Crossroads: Regional Power Struggles and Bangladesh's Rohingya Dilemma' (Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, 20 May 2025) https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2025/05/20/myanmars-rakhine-state-at-a-crossroads-regional-power-struggles-and-bangladeshs-rohingya-dilemma/ accessed 21 May 2025.

32 Ibid.

33 'Bangladesh: End Pushbacks of Rohingya Refugees, Investigate Beatings' (Fortify Rights, 26 April 2025) https://www.fortifyrights.org/bgd-inv-2024-04-26 accessed 5 June 2025.

34 Sharma P, 'Rohingya Refugees in India: Analysis of the Perceived Security Threats' (International Affairs Forum, 8 August 2023) https://www.ia-forum.org/Content/ViewInternal_Document.cfm?contenttype_id=0&ContentID=9639 accessed 19 May 2025.

35 Upadhyay S, 'Rohingya Crisis: Security Concerns and Diplomacy Dilemma for India' (International Centre for Peace Studies, 18 December 2024) https://www.icpsnet.org/issuebrief/Rohingya-Crisis-Security-Concerns-Shailendra-181224 accessed 5 June 2025.

36 Sullivan D, 'India Must Halt the Forced Deportation of Rohingya Genocide Survivors' (Refugees International, 9 May 2025) https://www.refugeesinternational.org/statements-and-news/india-must-halt-the-forced-deportation-of-rohingya-genocide-survivors/ accessed 20 May 2025.

37 'Alarmed by reports of Rohingya cast into the sea from Indian navy vessels, UN expert launches inquiry of "unconscionable, unacceptable acts"' (The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 15 May 2025) https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/05/alarmed-reports-rohingya-cast-sea-indian-navy-vessels-un-expert-launches accessed 20 May 2025.

38 Naseh M, 'One of the World's Largest Refugee Populations, Afghans Have Faced Increasing Restrictions in Iran' (Migration Policy Institute, 7 January 2025) https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/afghan-refugees-iran accessed 20 May 2025.

39 Ibid.

40 Heier J, Das A, Nabukhotny V, WATCH/GSOC Team and Archie A, 'PSA: Afghan Refugees in Pakistan and Iran under Threat of Forcible Repatriation; Coordinated International Humanitarian Response Needed' (The Counterterrorism Group, 19 April 2025) https://www.counterterrorismgroup.com/post/psa-afghan-refugees-in-pakistan-and-iran-under-threat-of-forcible-repatriation-coordinated-interna#ftnt14 accessed 20 May 2025.

41 'Pakistan: 'Treat us like human beings': Afghans in Pakistan at risk of unlawful deportation' (Amnesty International, 4 April 2025) https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/9217/2025/en/ accessed 18 May 2025.

42 Shahzad A, 'Pakistan orders illegal immigrants, including 1.73 mln Afghans, to leave' (Reuters, 3 October 2023) https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-orders-all-illegal-immigrants-leave-after-suicide-bombings-2023-10-03 accessed 21 May 2025.

43 Ibid.

44 'Afghan Nationals Return from Pakistan - April 2025 - DREF Operation MDRPK027' (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 25 April 2025) https://go-api.ifrc.org/api/downloadfile/90952/MDRPK027do accessed 20 May 2025.

45 'Integrated Response Plan for Afghan Returnees from Pakistan 2025' (United Nations Afghanistan, 1 May 2025) https://afghanistan.un.org/en/293745-integrated-response-plan-afghan-returnees-pakistan-2025 accessed 5 June 2025.

46 'Afghan Nationals Return from Pakistan - April 2025 - DREF Operation MDRPK027' (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 25 April 2025) https://go-api.ifrc.org/api/downloadfile/90952/MDRPK027do accessed 20 May 2025.

47 'Hundreds of thousands of Afghans forced back into danger, says UNHCR' (UN News, 29 April 2025) https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1162706 accessed 22 May 2025.

48 'Pakistan: Amnesty International launches #UndoTheDeadline campaign against unlawful deportation of Afghan nationals' (Amnesty International, 4 April 2025) https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/pakistan-amnesty-international-launches-undothedeadline-campaign-against-unlawful-deportation-of-afghan-nationals/ accessed 21 May 2025.

49 'UNHCR Regional Appeal: Returns from Iran

& Pakistan to Afghanistan' (UNHCR, 2 May 2025) https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/116054 accessed 21 May 2025.

[50] 'Briefing Notes: As Afghans are forced to return, UNHCR seeks support for humanitarian crisis' (UNHCR, 29 April 2025) https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/afghans-are-forced-return-unhcr-seeks-support-humanitarian-crisis accessed 20 May 2025.

[51] 'Briefing Notes: UNHCR: Funding cuts threaten the health of nearly 13 million displaced people' (UNHCR, 28 March 2025) https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-funding-cuts-threaten-health-nearly-13-million-displaced-people accessed 20 May 2025.

[52] 'UN Geneva Press Briefing' (The United Nations Office at Geneva, 4 February 2025) https://www.unognewsroom.org/story/en/2500/un-geneva-press-briefing-04-february-2025 accessed 21 May 2025.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] 'Briefing Notes: UNHCR: Funding cuts threaten the health of nearly 13 million displaced people' (UNHCR, 28 March 2025) https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-funding-cuts-threaten-health-nearly-13-million-displaced-people accessed 20 May 2025.

[57] 'APRRN Advocacy Briefer-Strategizing for Rohingya Refugee Protection and Durable Solutions' (Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, 15 May 2025) https://www.aprrn.org/publication-detail/83/ accessed 20 May 2025.

[58] Paul R, 'Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh fear aid cuts will deepen crisis' (Reuters, 28 March 2025) https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/rohingya-refugees-bangladesh-fear-aid-cuts-will-deepen-crisis-2025-03-27/ accessed 21 May 2025.

[59] Rezwan, 'USAID suspension has far-reaching impacts in South Asia' (Global Voices, 6 March 2025) https://globalvoices.org/2025/03/06/usaid-suspension-has-far-reaching-impacts-in-south-asia/ accessed 21 May 2025.

[60] Keay A, 'Pakistan hit hard by global aid cuts' (Act For Peace, 11 April 2025) https://actforpeace.org.au/pakistan-hit-hard-by-global-aid-cuts/ accessed 20 May 2025.

[61] Burkhalter D, 'How the United States used humanitarian aid for influence' (SWI swissinfo.ch, 20 May 2025) https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/international-geneva/how-the-united-states-used-humanitarian-aid-for-influence/89342741 accessed 21 May 2025.

[62] Burkhalter D and Turuban P, 'Who will come to the aid of a humanitarian system left behind by the West?' (SWI swissinfo.ch, 14 May 2025) https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/international-geneva/who-will-come-to-the-aid-of-a-humanitarian-system-left-behind-by-the-west/89308940 accessed 21 May 2025.

[63] Ibid. [64] Ibid. [65] Ibid. [66] Ibid.

[67] Tyler M and Trinh V, 'As Western aid dries up, Southeast Asia faces the fallout' (East Asia Forum, 1 April 2025) https://eastasiaforum.org/2025/04/01/as-western-aid-dries-up-southeast-asia-faces-the-fallout/ accessed 20 May 2025.

[68] 'WHO and Japan signed a $3.2 million Project to sustain life saving health interventions and strengthening health systems resilience in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char, Bangladesh' (World Health Organization, 20 February 2025) WHO and Japan signed a $3.2 million Project to sustain life savings health interventions and strengthening health systems resilience in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char, Bangladesh accessed 20 May 2025.

[69] Kurlantzick J, 'Bangladesh Could Turn to China as Trump Pulls Aid From the Country' (Council on Foreign Relations, 29 January 2025) https://www.cfr.org/blog/bangladesh-could-turn-china-trump-pulls-aid-country accessed 21 May 2025.

[70] 'UNHCR Emergency Handbook: Access to territory and non-refoulement' (UNHCR, 6 March 2025) https://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/legal-framework/access-territory-and-non-refoulement accessed 21 May 2025.

[71] 'Return of Afghans from Pakistan could worsen already dire humanitarian situation' (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 14 April 2025) https://www.ifrc.org/press-release/return-afghans-pakistan-could-worsen-already-dire-humanitarian-situation accessed 21 May 2025.

[72] Paul R, 'Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh fear aid cuts will deepen crisis' (Reuters, 28 March 2025) https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/rohingya-refugees-bangladesh-fear-aid-cuts-will-deepen-crisis-2025-03-27/ accessed 21 May 2025.

[73] Christophersen E, 'These 10 countries receive the most refugees: 2010–2019' (Norwegian Refugee Council, 14 November 2024) https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2020/the-10-countries-that-receive-the-most-refugees accessed 5 June 2025.

[74] Balikuddembe W, 'Uganda's Acclaimed Refugee Policy: The Difference Between What is on Paper and Reality' (Danish Development Research Network, 16 August 2022) https://ddrn.dk/10127/ accessed 5 June 2025.

[75] 'Pakistan: Government must stop ignoring global calls to halt unlawful deportation of Afghan refugees' (Amnesty International, 4 April 2025) https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/pakistan-government-must-halt-deportation-of-afghan-refugees/ accessed 21 May 2025.

[76] Sullivan D, 'India Must Halt the Forced Deportation of Rohingya Genocide Survivors' (Refugees International, 9 May 2025) https://www.refugeesinternational.org/statements-and-news/india-must-halt-the-forced-deportation-of-rohingya-genocide-survivors/ accessed 20 May 2025.

Pakistan's Bleeding Ulcer: Escalating Guerilla War in Balochistan

Robert Sutton

Key Takeaways

- Developmental neglect and perceived exploitation of the province by Islamabad and Beijing are driving Baloch's towards a nationalist, separatist movement.

- A process of coalescence amongst Baloch nationalist formations has enabled a growing tempo and sophistication of operations.

- Political unrest in Balochistan is not only militant violence, but a growing civil protest campaign against the rampant abuses and brutal tactics of the security forces.

- Crises on multiple fronts are undercutting Islamabad's ability to respond, further emboldening militant factions.

Violence has surged in the Pakistani province of Balochistan as non-state armed factions have become increasingly bold in the face of serious weakness exhibited by the state, both within Balochistan and other provinces. This security crisis for Pakistan is reaching a dramatic crescendo as an increasingly unified insurgency openly confronts the armed forces.

Always on the periphery of Pakistan, Baloch have periodically engaged in armed resistance in order to assert their interests against Islamabad, or to protest abuses.[1] The 21st Century has seen a marked shift in the social and tactical-operational dynamics of the conflict, as Baloch formations have slowly transitioned from being principally rural and organised along tribal lines, to a more urbanised and politically nationalist stance.[2]

Key drivers of conflict between Baloch nationalists and the Pakistani state have included the long-standing under-development of the region, interference in the province's politics by the central government, and systematic abuses and violence conducted by security forces.[3] The growing frustration in the province over high Chinese investments in the region has further inflamed the situation. The projects have not responded to citizens' interests or concerns so far, and have rather brought about segregation, restrictions on access to the sea for fishing, and suspicions around the true motives behind the investments. This ultimately translated into violence and an increase in military and security presence in the region.[4]

Military and Political Struggle

Most news media, when describing the Baloch insurgency, ascribe actions simply to the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), founded in 2000. According to analysis from West Point's Combating Terrorism Centre, the BLA underwent a split in 2017, producing the BLA-Jeeyand and the BLA-Azad.[5] It is specifically the BLA-J which has been responsible for the uptick in major attacks through their Operations "Zir Pahahzag," which targets Chinese workers and personnel; and "Dara-e-Bolan/Herof", which aimed to temporarily occupy highways and even urban areas.[6]

Since 2018, the BLA-J and other major factions, the Balochistan Liberation Front and the

Baloch Republican Guard, have been coordinating their activities through the Baloch Raaji Aajoi Sangar (BRAS), and on 3 March announced plans to further coalesce into a "Baloch National Army".[7] Perhaps the clearest sign of the Baloch factions' bolder stance is the hijacking of the "Jaffar Express" on 11 March, during which BLA gunmen successfully stopped the train and took as many as 200 hostages.[8] Casualty reports from the incident are inconsistent, with the Pakistani Armed Forces claiming to have killed 33 militants alongside 26 hostages and military deaths, while the BLA claimed to have ultimately executed 214 "enemy personnel" (that is, members of the armed forces or paramilitary travelling on the train).[9]

Witness reports from hostages describing the execution of multiple groups of hostages by militants, as well as others being shot when they attempted to flee, lends credence to a higher number of deaths than the official count.[10] Additionally, while a great amount of attention is naturally garnered by the Baloch's increasingly brazen and spectacular attacks, a sustained civil protest movement has been peacefully demonstrating in Balochistan's cities.[11] The main organisation within this movement, the Baloch Yakjehti ("Unity") Committee (BYC), is led largely by Baloch women. The BYC emerged in 2020, and its main effort has been towards resolving the human rights situation in the province, confronting the impunity and rampant violence of the State.[12] Although formal political unity between the civic and militant arms is not yet fully evident, Pakistani government claims notwithstanding[13], the BYC's existence is a clear indication of the nationalist movement's increasing embeddedness in Baloch society.

Dirty War

The Pakistani Armed Forces and security services have resorted to brutal tactics in order to suppress Baloch nationalist sentiments and organising. Over 200 cases of disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings in custody have been recorded by the Human Rights Council of Balochistan by March.[14] Although many of those targeted are activists or public sympathisers of the nationalist movement, just as many lack even nominal links. The Government has largely dismissed the problem, claiming that some 80% of the 2900 missing persons cases reported since 2011 have been "resolved", but these numbers have little to no credence amongst the families of the missing.[15] Many Baloch men have been subject to repeated detention and torture by Police or Frontier Corps personnel, often seemingly as reprisal for nearby insurgent activity.[16] Some families have seen multiple members disappear, such as the father and brother of Dr. Mahrang Baloch, one of the BYC's most prominent leaders and activists.[17] Further recent disappearances were reported in May, with Mehrullah Ahmed taken on 18 May in Tasp, Naveed Jamaldini on 19 May in Nushki, and Mir Balach Baloch on 20 May in Karachi.[18]

Men, women and children protest against forced kidnappings in Pakistan (Kiyya Baloch 2013)

While many of those taken into custody by Pakistani security forces are later released, the recovery of "tortured and mutilated" bodies is "routine" in Balochistan, and many are identified as having been arrested or detained. Recent examples of this pattern of extrajudicial killing include Sajid Nasir, taken in a raid on his home in Kolwah Gishang by "Pakistani forces and state-backed armed groups" the night of 23 May; his body being found the following morning.[19]

Security forces habitually employ violence in reaction to civil protest, often inflaming public sentiment, which yet more violence is used to control. Events in mid-March in the city of Quetta are illustrative here. When two BYC activists, brothers Bebarg and Hammal Zehri were arrested by the Counter Terrorism Department on 20 March, the BYC conducted a rally calling for their and other's release the following day.[20] Police opened fire on the gathering, killing three, including a 12-year-old child. Protests the following day in response to the killings were attacked by Police, and leading BYC activists, including Dr. Mahrang Baluch, were arrested. The Pakistani legal system has also moved against Baloch activists, charging them with "terrorism" and "sedition".[21] Subsequent demonstrations across Balochistan protesting these arrests were met with further Police violence, including gunfire in Panjgur and Lasbela.[22]

On the Baloch side, their tactics have also become increasingly ruthless, with certain BLA splinter factions having embraced suicide bombing. Such actions conducted by the BLA include the 4 March attack on a Frontier Corps convoy on the Quetta-Karachi highway,[23] and against a similar target in Nuskhi on 16 March, which resulted in the deaths of at least nine, although the BLA claimed to have killed ninety.[24] A car bomb also hit a market in Qillah Abdullah on 18 May, killing four, although no party has claimed this attack as yet,[25] while another struck a school bus in Khuzdar on 21 May, killing at least six.[26]

The so-called "Majeed Brigade" of the BLA-J is the main formation tasked with conducting these attacks, and has increasingly recruited women as its operatives.[27]

Jaffar express leaving Attock Jn on a cold morning (Syed Mazahir Haider 2019)

International Contexts

The escalating conflict in Balochistan should also be considered in the context of the broader political and security crisis in Pakistan.

The growing involvement of Chinese capital in Balochistan through its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects further complicates the resolution of the conflict. The CPEC program has been directed from outside the province, and is oriented principally towards transnational resource extraction and transport objectives, and has been accompanied by a major influx of 'foreign' workers and bureaucrats.[28]

Economic and infrastructure development is badly needed in Balochistan, the poorest

province in Pakistan, yet for most Baloch, whatever material benefits might be gained from CPEC developments are monopolised by 'Punjabi' or Chinese workers and business interests. A key example is the CPEC's centrepiece port at Gwadar, from which Balochistan province benefits only indirectly as 9% of revenue goes to the federal government, the other 91% are retained by the China Overseas Ports Holding Company.[29]

The sensitivity of the massive investments which underpin the CPEC has further incentivised the militarised security environment in Balochistan, while China pressures Pakistan to maintain order, and is escalating its own security contributions in the wake of BLA attacks on Chinese workers.[30]

The CPEC is thus something of a double-edged sword for the Pakistani government: Chinese economic support is critical for national infrastructure development, but that very development is driving conflict. The Pakistani military is facing not only the insurgency in Balochistan, but a tense and violent border with Afghanistan and a strategic standoff with India. Especially in relation to the latter, Chinese support is critical, which greatly incentivises against substantial reform to the CPEC so as not to alienate them.

Conclusion

In the short-term at least, the violence in Balochistan is likely to continue unabated. The Baloch seem more committed than ever to their separatist objective, while the Pakistani state shows little appetite for concession or reform. Even with the growing rate and sophistication of attacks however, no insurgent group has been able to actually push back Pakistani state control over the province, simply accelerating the violence without any apparent strategic gains or effect. However, Balochistan is not the only crisis Islamabad has to contend with; Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa is seeing an even higher rate of violence, there are the stirrings of yet another separatist struggle in Sindh,[31] and they are hobbled by a deeply troubled economy.[32]

Barring a major turnaround in its strategic fortunes, Pakistan may well find itself stretched too thinly in coming years to hold any of its periphery.

Policy Recommendations

- The Pakistani government should immediately end its policy of forced disappearances and scale back its militarised security apparatus in Balochistan, which of itself is a serious factor fuelling the deteriorating security situation.
- The Pakistani government will need to give Baloch communities a substantially greater benefits from the resources and revenues drawn from their province. Systemic impoverishment of Balochs will likely incite future even with a successful counter-insurgency effort.
- Insurgent forces should cease attacks on 'foreign' workers and civilians associated with Pakistan's 'occupation', as well as the use of suicide bombing and hostage-taking tactics.

Endnotes

1 Tabish Munir, 'The Escalation of the Balochistan Insurgency: Causes, Consequences and Future Directions' International Affairs Forum (5 May 2025) https://ia-forum.org/Content/ViewInternal_Document.cfm?contenttype_id=0&ContentID=15077 accessed 12 May 2025.

2 Ayush Verma, Imtiaz Baloch and Riccardo Valle, 'The Baloch Insurgency in Pakistan: Evolution, Tactics and Regional Security Implications' Combating Terrorism Center, West Point (April 2025) https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-baloch-insurgency-in-pakistan-evolution-tactics-and-regional-security-implications/ accessed 10 May 2025.

3 Ibid.

4 Shah Meer Baloch and Hannah Ellis-Petersen, 'What went wrong with 'Pakistan's Dubai'? – inside the Chinese initiative that is prompting terror attacks' The Guardian (26 January 2025) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/26/what-went-wrong-with-pakistans-dubai-inside-the-chinese-initiative-that-is-prompting-terror-attacks accessed 20 May 2025.

5 Ayush Verma, Imtiaz Baloch and Riccardo Valle, 'The Baloch Insurgency in Pakistan: Evolution, Tactics and Regional Security Implications' Combating Terrorism Center, West Point (April 2025) https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-baloch-insurgency-in-pakistan-evolution-tactics-and-regional-security-implications/ accessed 10 May 2025.

6 Ibid.

7 Debdutta Chakraborty, 'Baloch separatist groups to fight under one unified military command to counter Pakistan and China' The Print (3 March 2025) https://theprint.in/world/baloch-separatist-groups-to-fight-under-one-unified-military-command-to-counter-pakistan-china/2528610/ accessed 22 May 2025.

8 Farzana Shaikh, 'The hijacking of a train marks a watershed in the Balochistan insurgency' Chatham House (21 March 2025) https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/03/hijacking-train-marks-watershed-balochistan-insurgency accessed 10 May 2025.

9 Ashish Shukla, 'The Jaffar Express Hijack and Shrinking State Writ in Balochistan' Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (19 March 2025) https://www.idsa.in/publisher/comments/the-jaffar-express-hijack-and-shrinking-state-writ-in-balochistan accessed 9 June 2025.

10 Ibid.

11 Abdul Rahman, 'Arrests of Baloch activists in Pakistan sparks nationwide outrage' People's Dispatch (25 March 2025) https://peoplesdispatch.org/2025/03/25/arrests-of-baloch-activists-in-pakistan-spark-nationwide-outrage/ accessed 13 May 2025.

12 Dilshad Baluch, 'An Interview with Baloch Yakjehti Committee Leader Dr. Mahrang Baloch' The Diplomat (25 February 2025) https://thediplomat.com/2025/02/an-interview-with-baloch-yakjehti-committee-leader-dr-mahrang-baloch/ accessed 13 May 2025.

13 'BYC is a Proxy of Terrorists, says ISPR' The Express Tribune (6 August 2024) https://tribune.com.pk/story/2485855/byc-is-a-proxy-of-terrorists-says-ispr accessed 20 May 2025.

14 Karlos Zurutuza, 'Repression in Balochistan: Another Turn of the State's Terror Screw' Nationalia (9 May 2025) https://www.nationalia.info/new/11687/repression-in-balochistan-another-turn-of-the-states-terror-screw accessed 12 May 2025.

15 Farhat Javed, 'A Life Spent Waiting – and Searching Rows of Unclaimed Bodies' BBC (23 March 2025) https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c15qyyzz89lo accessed 23 May 2025.

16 Hazaran RahimDad, 'A Phone Call and Two Bullets: How a Baloch Voice was Silenced' The Wire (2 March 2025) https://thewire.in/south-asia/a-phone-call-and-two-bullets-how-a-baloch-voice-was-silenced accessed 23 May 2025.

17 Farhat Javed, 'A Life Spent Waiting – and Searching Rows of Unclaimed Bodies' BBC (23 March 2025) https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c15qyyzz89lo accessed 23 May 2025.

18 'BYC Member Among Three 'Forcibly Disappeared' in Karachi, Panjgur and Nushki' The Balochistan Post (21 May 2025) https://thebalochistanpost.net/2025/05/byc-member-among-three-forcibly-disappeared-in-karachi-panjgur-and-nushki/ accessed 24 May 2025.

19 'Three Dead Bodies Recovered in Balochistan, Including a Victim of Enforced Disappearance' The Balochistan Post (24 May 2025) https://thebalochistanpost.net/2025/05/three-dead-bodies-recovered-in-balochistan-including-a-victim-of-enforced-disappearance/ accessed 24 May 2025.

20 'Pakistan: Systematic attacks and relentless crackdown on Baloch activists must end' Amnesty International (27 March 2025) https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/03/pakistan-systematic-attacks-and-relentless-crackdown-on-baloch-activists-must-end/ accessed 16 May 2025.

21 Dilshad Baluch, 'Pakistan's War on Balochistan Has Reached a Point of No Return' The Diplomat (24 March 2025) https://thediplomat.com/2025/03/pakistans-war-on-balochistan-has-reached-a-point-of-no-return/ accessed 13 May 2025.

22 Ibid.

23 Saadullah Akhtar, 'Baloch separatist group claims attack on Pakistan security convoy by woman suicide bomber' Arab News (4 March 2025) https://www.arabnews.com/node/2592344/pakistan accessed 24 May 2025.

24 Omer Farooq Khan, 'Baloch outfit kills 9, wounds 35 in suicide bombing of paramilitary convoy' The Times of India (17 March 2025) https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/baloch-outfit-kills-9-wounds-35-in-suicide-bombing-of-paramilitary-convoy/articleshow/119085417.cms

accessed 20 May 2025.

25 Omar al-Yahyai, 'Car Bomb in Pakistan's Balochistan Leaves Four Dead and 20 Injured' Euronews (19 May 2025) https://www.euronews.com/2025/05/19/car-bomb-kills-four-in-pakistan accessed 24 May 2025.

26 'Khuzdar attack driven by Indian provocation, had nothing to do with Baloch identity: DG ISPR' Dawn (23 May 2025) https://www.dawn.com/news/1912830/khuzdar-attack-driven-by-indian-provocation-had-nothing-to-do-with-baloch-identity-dg-ispr accessed 24 May 2025.

27 Sushim Mukul, 'Pakistan Rattled as Baloch Women Turn Suicide Bombers' India Today (27 March 2025) https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/pakistan-rattled-baloch-women-turn-suicide-bombers-explained-army-china-cpec-balochistan-bla-majeed-brigade-2699545-2025-03-27 accessed 23 May 2025.

28 Mihrullah, Muhammad Hatim and Adeel Irfan, 'CPEC, in Balochistan, the Marginalized, Exploited and Beneficiaries' The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies (18 May 2025) https://thecrsss.com/index.php/Journal/article/view/532 accessed 9 June 2025.

29 Ibid.

30 'China's Growing Security Footprint in Pakistan' The Soufan Centre (25 April 2025) https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2025-april-25/ accessed 9 June 2025.

31 'Armed Men 'Capture' Military Outpost in Kalat; BLF Claims Attacks in Kharan, SRA Claims Train Attack in Sindh' The Balochistan Post (23 April 2025) https://thebalochistanpost.net/2025/04/armed-men-capture-military-outpost-in-kalat-blf-sets-up-checkpoint-in-kharan/ accessed 23 May 2025.

32 Aasim Mairaj Husain, 'Rescuing Pakistan's Economy' Dawn (28 April 2025) https://www.dawn.com/news/1906969 accessed 22 May 2025.

Violence Against Civilians Escalates Amid Insurgency in Southern Thailand

Kalara Perera

Key Takeaways

- Thailand has been grappling with a decades-long insurgency concentrated in its southernmost provinces with armed groups from the Muslim Malay community.
- The conflict has shifted from demands for cultural and political rights to a broader separatist movement involving armed violence and human rights violations.
- Since 2013, peace negotiations between the Thai government and insurgent factions have been intermittent and frequently stalled and if it remains unaddressed, the conflict will escalate further, deepening civilian suffering and eroding prospects for long-term peace.

The protracted insurgency in Thailand's Deep South has emerged as one of Southeast Asia's longest-running internal conflicts. This conflict pits the Thai state against a range of insurgent groups most notably the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) seeking political recognition, cultural autonomy, and justice for historical grievances. This struggle has resulted in over 7,000 deaths since 2004.[1] The ongoing violence affects not only national security but also the safety, livelihoods, and well-being of civilians. The conflict continues to challenge Thailand's internal stability and raises pressing questions about national integration, minority rights, and the role of the international community in supporting peace.

Historical Background

The modern day Thai Southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and certain parts of the Songkhla province and areas of Northern Malaysia, originally were a part of the Pattani sultanate till the 19th century.[2] In 1902, Pattani was formally subjugated by Siam[3] and the Anglo-Siamese Treaty between Great Britain and Siam in 1909 cemented the borders and the Pattani came under the direct rule of Bangkok.[4] Subsequently, Siamese authorities initiated a process aimed at national unity through cultural assimilation along coercive Buddhist values, Thai language and Thai monarchy.[5]

This process included various measures such as displacing the political role played by the local aristocracy and marginalising the pondoks (Muslim religious schools). The 1921 Compulsory Primary Education Act, made it compulsory for all children to attend state primary school for four years and to learn the Thai Language.[6] When Prime Minister Pibulsonggram came into power in 1938, the name of the country was changed from 'Siam' to 'Thailand', meaning 'nation of Thais'.[7] Minority languages including the Malay language used in Pattani were banned in public offices.[8] Malay or Arabic surnames and Malay ethnic attire were also forbidden in public places.[9] There was widespread dissatisfaction with the government during the early years of the 20th century which erupted in violence after the end of the Second World War.[10] The disappearance of Haji Sulong, who led a campaign against the assimilation policies of the government in 1954 was a turning point in the conflict.[11] In the 1960s and 1970s, several rebel organisations emerged including the BRN.[12] While different governments in power had varying approaches to the issue, ranging from hardline security crackdowns to attempts at

Map of Southern Thailand showing ethnic distribution (Wikimedia Commons 2022)

negotiation and development, none have been successful in resolving the conflict so far.

Eruption of Violence from 2004

In 2004, the conflict escalated into a more violent phase, with major incidents such as the Tak Bai massacre and Krue Se Mosque siege. In April 2004, insurgents attacked 11 police offices in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala.[13] After which, 32 insurgents took refuge in the historic Krue-Se mosque. Security forces surrounded the mosque and killed the insurgents.[14] The tactics used by the forces were questioned and condemned by local and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).[15]

In October the same year, the infamous "Tak Bai incident" took place. Due to the detaining of six men alleged to have provided insurgents with weapons, there was a mass protest against this detention in front of the Tak Bai police station.[16] The security forces opened fire against the protestors causing seven deaths and more than 1,000 protestors were piled into trucks and brought to an army camp about 150 km away.[17] During the journey, 78 died from asphyxiation as a result of being smothered by the bodies of other detainees.[18] There was a domestic and international outcry condemning the act of the government.

These incidents marked the resumption of violence in Southern Thailand, leading to the Thai government's heavy-handed military response to the conflict and damaging the prospect of peace that had been gained through several years of negotiations between the government and insurgent groups.[19]

Current Context

In the current context, the conflict has become increasingly violent. The recent killing of a 16-year-old novice monk and injuring of a 12-year-old monk form part of a trend whereby attacks are carried out on the Buddhist clergy by the BRN.[20] These attacks are not only directed at the religion itself but also towards the State, as Buddhist temples symbolize Thai state authority in territories that separatists consider rightfully belonging to ethnic Malay Muslims.[21] It is also symbolic of religious hatred and reflective of the ethnic disharmony in the southern provinces of Thailand, fueled by decades of cultural suppression. The brutality of some of the attacks has caused great fear among the clergy forcing them to leave their respective temples in the South.[22] Initially, the conflict was rooted in ethnic and national tension but such attacks on the clergy have added a religious dimension to the conflict as well.[23] Reportedly, it will take time to undo the aggrievance of the Buddhist community towards the Muslim community in Southern Thailand.[24] Further, such attacks are aiming to drive away local Thai Buddhist civilians. In addition to the targeting of Buddhist monks, other targets include military and government officials and facilities, commercial locations, state schools and teachers, Buddhist civilians, amongst whom some suspected of being informers, medical personnel and public health centres, and Malay Muslims in support of Thai authorities.[25]

Violations of International Law

There are records of major human rights violations being committed by insurgents as well as Thai authorities. State sanctioned incidents such as the Tak Bai massacre was a cause for many human rights violations with protestors being shot at, shackled, and transported in inhumane conditions by security forces.[26] Over the years, Human Rights Watch has

recorded numerous cases of arbitrary arrests, torture, "disappearances," and extrajudicial killings by Thai authorities.[27] However, there has been impunity towards security forces and no accountability towards Malay civilians.[28] This impunity has fueled Malayan civilians' distrust of the government and their conviction that justice will not be served. There have been instances where insurgents have acted in retaliation to the actions of the government and their conviction that justice will not be served. There have been instances where insurgents have acted in retaliation to the actions of the government. For instance, next to the body of a killed Thai farmer, insurgents had left a note saying "You killed our innocent people. I will kill your innocent people" capturing the cyclic nature of the violence in the region.[29]

Insurgent groups have also committed major human rights violations, not just towards Thai Buddhist civilians but also towards Muslim Malay individuals who have been accused of supporting Thai authorities.[30] In addition to the use of explosives to destroy buildings and attack Buddhist civilians, insurgents have used weapons such as machetis to brutally kill people. They have deliberately targeted civilians and public institutions as symbols of the Thai State.[31] Children have also become victims of these attacks. Attacking civilians during armed conflict constitutes not only human rights violations but also breaches international humanitarian law (IHL), which prohibits attacks on civilians, civilian objects, and places of worship.[32] Insurgent tactics such as reprisals, civilian executions, and mutilation are also explicitly prohibited under international law.[33]

Government Response and Challenges

After the resurgence of violence in 2004, the Thai government under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra largely took a security and military approach.[34] He imposed martial law, emergency decrees which gave the Thai authorities sweeping powers including the power to detain individuals without a charge for 30 days, and deployed thousands of military troops.[35] His successor Surayudh Chulanond attempted to de-escalate the tensions.[36] Despite the government's efforts, violence in the region continued to intensify and in 2007, the government adopted a more aggressive counterinsurgency policy which did not resolve the situation. It was not until the 2011-2014 elected government of Yingluck Shinawatra that Thailand commenced formal negotiations with the insurgents in 2013, specifically with the BRN.[37] Malaysia acted as the facilitator in the process. However, the process was hindered and ultimately stalled by anti-government protests, lack of cooperation from the military not following through the ceasefire and resuming combat operations in the South, as well as anger over the fact that only one insurgent group was involved in the negotiations.

Yingluck Shinawatra, former Prime Minister of Thailand speaking in London, 13 November 2012 (FCDO 2012)

In 2014, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) seized power through a military coup and restarted the peace negotiation process facilitated by Malaysian authorities. The new negotiations involved the Thai regime and a new insurgent group: MARA Patani.[38] The BRN, the largest active insurgent group, was not part of the negotiations.[39] Despite many meetings, no substantial progress was made.[40] In 2019, the NCOP gained political legitimacy as a result of winning elections and the BRN resumed its negotiations with the Thai government in 2020.[41] The 2020 Peace Talks were considered as a breakthrough due to the direct engagement with the BRN. While the COVID-19 pandemic did hinder face to face meetings, both parties were able to agree on a set of general principles[42] and Ramadan ceasefires both in 2022 and 2023.[43] In January 2024, both parties announced a Joint Comprehensive Plan toward Peace as well. However, Paetongtarn Shinawatra came to power as Prime Minister in August 2024. The chief negotiator was replaced and his successor was not immediately appointed.[44] The BRN criticised the delay and warned that trust was eroding.[45] During the 2025 Ramadan period, ceasefire efforts were not successful.[46] At present, the peace process remains at a standstill. The lack of a clear political roadmap, coupled with ongoing violence and leadership transitions within the Thai government[46], have hindered progress.

Conclusion

Lasting peace in Southern Thailand requires more than intermittent negotiations or ceasefires, it demands political will, mutual trust, inclusive dialogues with all insurgent factions and a commitment to justice. While security operations may reduce short-term violence, they cannot resolve deep-rooted grievances tied to identity, governance, and marginalisation and these realities need to be recognised. A just and durable peace will require both sides to prioritise human dignity, democratic participation, and reconciliation. Without a genuine commitment to these principles, the conflict in the Deep South will remain unresolved, and opportunities for peace will continue to slip away further driving the civilian human cost of warring parties breaching IHL.

Policy Recommendations

- The Thai government needs to acknowledge and address historical and cultural grievances particularly around Malay-Muslim identity, language rights, and local governance.

- The Thai government needs to revisit past human rights violations, including landmark cases like Tak Bai, and investigate attacks by insurgent groups. Transparent investigations and reparations are crucial to rebuilding trust.

- The international community should encourage both the Thai government and BRN to uphold international norms, including the protection of civilians and adherence to international humanitarian law

- ASEAN should take a more proactive peace and diplomacy stance, moving beyond non-interference to constructive engagement.

Endnotes

1 Tommy Walker, 'Will Thailand's Deep South Ever See Lasting Peace?' (DW, 22 May 2025) https://www.dw.com/en/will-thailands-deep-south-ever-see-lasting-peace/a-72608099 accessed 25 May 2025.

2 Neil J Melvin, 'Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency' (SIPRI Policy Paper No 20, September 2007) https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRIPP20.pdf accessed 25 May 2025.

3 Ibid.

4 Jay Lamey, 'Peace in Patani? The Prospect of a Settlement in Southern Thailand' (2013) 2(3) Stability: International Journal of Security & Development https://stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.bt accessed 22 May 2025.

5 Tejendra Pherali, 'Social Justice, Education and Peacebuilding: Conflict Transformation in Southern Thailand' (2021) 51(6) Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03057925.2021.1951666 accessed 22 May 2025.

6 Neil J Melvin, 'Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency' (SIPRI Policy Paper No 20, September 2007) https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRIPP20.pdf accessed 25 May 2025.

7 Shinjiro Shibayama, 'The Historical Development of Structural Violence' (SPF, 15 January 2014) https://www.spf.org/apbi/news_en/t_140115.html?utm accessed 23 May 2025.

8 Paul Chambers et al, 'Conflict in the Deep South of Thailand: Never-ending Stalemate?' (Peace Resource Collaborative, June 2019) https://peaceresourcecollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Introduction-Conflict-in-the-Deep-South-of-Thailand-Neverending-Stal.pdf accessed 25 May 2025.

9 Ibid.

10 Thanet Aphornsuvan, 'Origins of Malay Muslim "Separatism" in Southern Thailand' (Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, October 2004) https://ari.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/wps04_032.pdf accessed 25 May 2025.

11 Ibid.

12 Paul Chambers et al, 'Conflict in the Deep South of Thailand: Never-ending Stalemate?' (Peace Resource Collaborative, June 2019) https://peaceresourcecollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Introduction-Conflict-in-the-Deep-South-of-Thailand-Neverending-Stal.pdf accessed 25 May 2025.

13 Nurrisha Ismail, 'Locked in Unrest: Southern Thailand's Insurgency 20 Years On' (The Diplomat, 13 November 2024) https://thediplomat.com/2024/11/locked-in-unrest-southern-thailands-insurgency-20-years-on/ accessed 23 May 2025.

14 Ibid.

15 Human Rights Watch, 'Thailand: Investigate Krue Se Mosque Raid – No Justice Two Years After Deadly Clashes in South' (28 April 2008) https://www.hrw.org/news/2006/04/28/thailand-investigate-krue-se-mosque-raid accessed 23 May 2025.

16 International Commission of Jurists, Thailand: A Historic Step Towards Justice in the Tak Bai Incident (23 August 2024) https://www.icj.org/thailand-a-historic-step-towards-justice-in-the-tak-bai-incident/ accessed 23 May 2025.

17 Human Rights Watch, Thailand: 20 Years of Injustice for Tak Bai Massacre Victims (28 October 2024) https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/28/thailand-20-years-injustice-tak-bai-massacre-victims accessed 23 May 2025.

18 Ibid.

19 Tejendra Pherali, 'Social Justice, Education and Peacebuilding: Conflict Transformation in Southern Thailand' (2021) 41(6) Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03057925.2021.1951666 accessed 25 May 2025.

20 Human Rights Watch, 'Insurgents in Southern Thailand Kill 16-Year-Old Buddhist Novice: Children, Monks the Victims of Unlawful Separatist Attacks' (24 April 2025) https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/24/insurgents-southern-thailand-kill-16-year-old-buddhist-novice accessed 25 May 2025.

21 Human Rights Watch, 'Thailand: Insurgents Kill Buddhist Monks – Attack on Temple in Deep South a War Crime' (19 January 2019) https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/19/thailand-insurgents-kill-buddhist-monks accessed 23 May 2025.

22 Human Rights Watch, No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces (27 August 2007) https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/08/27/no-one-safe/insurgent-attacks-civilians-thailands-southern-border-provinces accessed 23 May 2025.

23 The Indian Express, 'Gunmen kill two Buddhist monks in Thailand's troubled south' (19 January 2019) https://indianexpress.com/article/world/thailand-rattanupap-buddhist-temple-attack-5546118 accessed 23 May 2025.

24 Ibid.

25 Neil J Melvin, 'Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency' (SIPRI Policy Paper No 20, September 2007) https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRIPP20.pdf accessed 25 May 2025.

26 Human Rights Watch, No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces (27 August 2007) https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/08/27/no-one-safe/insurgent-attacks-civilians-thailands-southern-border-provinces accessed 23 May 2025.

27 Ibid. 28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Neil J Melvin, 'Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency' (SIPRI Policy Paper No 20, September 2007) https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRIPP20.pdf accessed 25 May 2025.

31 Ibid.

32 Human Rights Watch, Thailand: Insurgents Kill Buddhist Monks, Attack on Temple in Deep South a War Crime (19 January 2019) https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/19/thailand-insurgents-kill-buddhist-monks accessed 23 May 2025.

33 Ibid.

34 Paul Chambers et al, 'Conflict in the Deep South of Thailand: Never-ending Stalemate?' (Peace Resource Collaborative, June 2019) https://peaceresourcecollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Introduction-Conflict-in-the-Deep-South-of-Thailand-Neverending-Stal.pdf accessed 25 May 2025.

35 Ibid.

36 Human Rights Watch, No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces (27 August 2007) https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/08/27/no-one-safe/insurgent-attacks-civilians-thailands-southern-border-provinces accessed 23 May 2025.

37 International Crisis Group, Southern Thailand: Dialogue in Doubt Asia Report (8 July 2015) https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/icg/2015/en/105918 accessed 23 May 2025.

38 MARA Patani includes a collection of representatives from different insurgent umbrella groups in Thailand.

39 Benar News, 'Analyst: Thailand Sidelining MARA Patani Via New Peace Talks with BRN' (4 February 2020) https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/BRN-peace-talks-02042020194333.html accessed 25 May 2025.

40 International Crisis Group, Southern Thailand: Dialogue in Doubt Asia Report (8 July 2015) https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/icg/2015/en/105918 accessed 23 May 2025.

41 Gerard McDermott, 'The Last in a List of False Starts? The MARA Initiative for South Thailand (2015–2019)' (28 September 2020) Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia https://kyotoreview.org/issue-28/the-last-in-a-list-of-false-starts-the-mara-initiative-for-south-thailand-2015-2019/ accessed 25 May 2025.

42 Bangkok Post, 'Govt, BRN Agree Ramadan Truce in New Talks' (3 April 2022) https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2289398/govt-brn-agree-ramadan-truce-in-new-talks accessed 25 May 2025.

43 Benar News, 'Thailand, Southern Rebels Agree to 40-Day Ramadan Peace Initiative' (1 April 2022) https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/thai-brn-peace-talks-04012022143427.html accessed 25 May 2025.

44 Bangkok Post, 'Government Waits to Pick New Peace Chief' (12 March 2025) https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2977998/government-waits-to-pick-new-peace-chief accessed 25 May 2025.

45 Bangkok Post, 'BRN Rebels Tell Govt to "Show Sincerity" (21 December 2024) https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2924127/brn-rebels-tell-govt-to-show-sincerity accessed 25 May 2025.

46 Tommy Walker, 'Will Thailand's Deep South Ever See Lasting Peace?' (DW, 22 May 2025) https://www.dw.com/en/will-thailands-deep-south-ever-see-lasting-peace/a-72608099 accessed 25 May 2025.

Inside the Kashmir Crisis: India's Strikes, Pakistan's Response, and a Region on Edge

Ojus Tyagi

Key Takeaways

- The Pahalgam attack marked a serious intelligence failure and triggered regional escalation.
- India's Operation Sindoor demonstrated a calibrated but assertive counterterror strategy targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan.
- Pakistan responded with Operation Marka-e-Haq, leading to the first major India–Pakistan aerial and missile standoff since Balakot (2019).
- The conflict underlined the instability of the deterrence framework and the limitations of diplomatic mechanisms like the Indus Waters Treaty and Shimla Agreement.

On 22 April, India's scenic Kashmiri valley of Pahalgam witnessed the attack and subsequent killing of 26 tourists by terrorists. The attack drew sharp criticism from the Indian Prime Minister and world leaders, rebuking the heinous attack.[1][2][3] In light of the attack, political strategists and policymakers highlighted India's previous counter-terrorist measures against Pakistan and evaluated further how India would react to its civilian casualties.[4]

After a series of tactical, diplomatic, commercial, and strategic retaliatory countermeasures between the two countries, on 7 May, after a 15-day hiatus, India attacked nine alleged terrorist bases in Pakistan, four of which were in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and five in Pakistan's mainland. These attacks led to a four-day-long "near war" situation wherein India's Operation Sindoor (Hindi for "vermillion powder worn by Indian women on their forehead") and Pakistan's Operation "Marka-e-Haq" ("Battle for Justice"), made world headlines.

The Attack: Facts and Immediate Response

The Pahalgam attack highlighted security loopholes in India's Internal security architecture, noteworthy at the time of American Vice President J.D. Vance's 4-day visit to India.[5] The Vice President's visit was significant in bolstering India-United States (US) relations amidst the US-China trade war. Moreover, the strategic timing of the attack can be linked to the recent internal security issues in India's rival nation, Pakistan.

On 11 March, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) hijacked the Jaffar Express, killing 21 civilians.[6][7] Pakistan accused the BLA of using Indian weapons which were rejected by Indian authorities as "baseless".[8] Not long after, Pakistan's ISI Chief General Asim Munir's controversial comments distinguishing Pakistanis from Hindus and reaffirming Pakistan's support for Kashmir stirred public debate in India.[9][10]

The Pahalgam attack reportedly had a sectarian nature as victims were selected based on their religious identity as Hindu and Christian men.[11][12] The assailants killed 25 Indian civilians and one Nepali civilian, all of whom were spending their vacation in the "mini Switzerland" of India.[13] A few hours after the Pahalgam attack, the Resistance Front, an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Pakistan-based non state armed group, claimed responsibility for the attack.[14] However, a few days after the claim, the group reversed

its stance, stating that the group "unequivocally denies any involvement in the Pahalgam incident."[15]

Max Abrahms, Professor of Political Science at Northeastern University and an expert on credit-claiming patterns of terrorist groups, states that such moves by terrorist organisations have historically been observed if the attacks seem to be on civilians rather than military personnel.[16]

India responded to the attack by putting the Indus Waters Treaty "in abeyance", which was considered an "act of war" by Pakistan.[17] The 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, brokered by the World Bank, ensured equitable distribution of the Indus River water and its tributaries to both India and Pakistan.

A series of retaliatory measures ensued between both countries wherein Pakistan suspended the Shimla Agreement, further closing Pakistan's airspace for Indian aircraft. India, on the other hand, closed the Integrated Attari check post and banned Pakistani nationals from traveling under its SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES).[18] [19]

Baisaran Meadow/Valley near Pahalgam (Vinayaraj, Wikimedia Commons 2012)

The Military Escalation: Operations Sindoor and Marka-e-Haq

After much anticipatory deliberation, on 7 May at midnight, the Indian military carried out a series of "focused, measured and non-escalatory" strikes on nine alleged terrorist camps, four of which were situated in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and another five in Pakistan's mainland.[20] Termed "Operation Sindoor", the operation symbolised the woes of recently widowed spouses of the Pahalgam attack.

In its counterattack operation "Marka-e-Haq" ("Battle for Justice"), Pakistan claimed to have shot down six Indian Air Force jets by Chinese-built J-10s.[21] The number was likely overstated by the Pakistani authorities as investigative reports found debris from only three jets.[22] [23]

Both countries made unprecedented military choices with state-of-the-art artillery. While Pakistan employed short-range ballistic missiles, such as Fatah-I and Fatah-II, India used the Brahmos cruise missile and European SCALP-EG.[24] Throughout the next three days (8-10 May), both countries were embroiled in drone warfare to cause significant damage to the other side.

The Indian Director General of Air Operations termed these drone attacks as a "raid", operationalised to compromise and "saturate" the Indian air defense system.[25] Pakistan, on the other hand, witnessed and intercepted around 11 attack sites by Indian drones.[26] In terms of drone technology, India identified the Turkish-origin "Asisguard Songar" and

another unnamed "armed UAV" used by Pakistan in a target site in Punjab.[27] India itself used a variety of Israel-origin Harpy and Harop drones.[28]

IMF Bailout

9 May brought a completely new turn to the hostility with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) long-standing decision. The international body released the last tranche of a US$ 1 billion bailout to Pakistan under its Extended Fund Facility (E.E.F.).[29] The total corpus of the E.E.F. was US$ 7 billion, approved in 2024, to be utilised for 37 months for "building resilience and enabling sustainable growth" in Pakistan.

Pakistan's Prime Minister's Office released a statement expressing Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's satisfaction over the approval of US$ 1 billion.[30] India, on the other hand, strongly condemned IMF's move questioning the "efficacy" of such bailouts which ultimately "sponsor cross border terrorism" and send a "dangerous message to the global community".[31]

The IMF bailout, however, failed to de-escalate the entrenched military confrontation.

The De-escalation

The situation reached its escalatory zenith on 10 May when India attacked the Nur Khan airbase at 2:30 am.[32] The Nur Khan Base, as a part of the large Chaklala military cantonment near Rawalpindi, was a strategic military outpost for Pakistan's Joint staff headquarters.

Pakistan immediately responded with its new subsumed operation under Marka-e-Haq- "Bunyan-um-Marsoos", proclaiming that "whenever Pakistan's sovereignty is threatened, response will be decisive".[33] The operation's name signified a steel wall against "Indian media's disinformation blitz and reckless war-mongering".[34] The Pakistan Air Force claimed to attack several Indian military outposts including Srinagar, Jammu, and Pathankot, all of which sustained major damages.[35]

To appease the hostile neighbours, the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke with Pakistan's army chief General Syed Asim Munir as well as India's foreign minister, S. Jaishankar.[36] Shortly after, US President Donald Trump posted on his X channel- "After a long night of talks mediated by the United States, I am pleased to announce that India and Pakistan have agreed to a FULL AND IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE".[37]

According to an Indian press release, Pakistan "approached the United States to broker calm" and subsequently Pakistan initiated the ceasefire after its Director General of Military Operations approached its Indian counterpart.[38] On 10 May 2025, at 1700 hours both sides agreed to halt military actions on land, air, and sea.[39]

External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar paid tributes to 26/11 terror attack victims at the UNSC Special Meeting of Counter-Terrorism Committee on 28 and 29 October 2022 (MEAphotogallery on Flickr 2022)

Conclusion

The Pahalgam terror attack and the subsequent military operations underscore the fragility of South Asia's strategic stability. The swift escalation from a localised attack to cross-border aerial warfare highlighted enduring fault lines in India–Pakistan relations.

Despite significant technological advancements and global mediation, the crisis revealed the limited deterrent value of past treaties and the precarious nature of regional peace. As India recalibrates its defence posture and diplomatic strategies, it must weigh decisive military responses against the risks of miscalculation in a nuclearised environment.

Policy Recommendations

- Institutionalise Intelligence Sharing Mechanisms: bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks must be strengthened to prevent surprise attacks, similar to recommendations by Rajagopalan and Narang in their study on deterrence instability in South Asia.[40]

- Reevaluate the Strategic Use of the Indus Waters Treaty: while suspending the treaty served as strategic pressure, long-term abeyance could backfire diplomatically and environmentally. Analysts suggest India could explore "gradual coercion" strategies instead.[41]

- Leverage Multilateral Forums to Isolate Terror Support: India must proactively use platforms like BRICS, G20, and SCO to highlight cross-border terror funding and push for international accountability of state sponsors.[42]

- Promote Confidence Building Measures (CBMs): India and Pakistan must revive dormant CBMs, particularly military hotlines and early warning protocols, to avoid accidental escalation.[43]

Endnotes

1 UN Security Council (2025), 'Security Council Press Statement on Terrorist Attack in Jammu and Kashmir' (UN Press Release SC/16050, 8 May 2025) https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16050.doc.htm accessed 23 May 2025.

2 'Kashmir Massacre: Trump, Putin, Iran, Israel Condemn Jihadist Attack on Hindu Tourists' (Newsweek, 8 May 2025) https://www.newsweek.com/kashmir-massacre-trump-putin-iran-israel-condemn-jihadist-attack-hindu-tourists-2062760 accessed 23 May 2025.

3 US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 'USCIRF Condemns Attack in Kashmir' (USCIRF, 25 April 2025) https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-condemns-attack-kashmir accessed 1 June 2025.

4 Biswas S, 'Deadly Kashmir attack risks India military escalation against Pakistan' (BBC News, 23 April 2025) https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwynx7kgyqvo accessed 1 June 2025.

5 All India Radio News, 'US Vice President J D Vance arrives in New Delhi for 4-day official visit' (All India Radio News, 21 April 2025) https://www.newsonair.gov.in/pm-modi-to-hold-meeting-with-us-vice-president-j-d-vance-in-new-delhi/ accessed 1 June 2025.

6 Gavin Butler and BBC Urdu, 'Killed in front of our eyes: How the Pakistan train hijacking unfolded' (BBC News, 13 March 2025) https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy0d5y9ew24o accessed 1 June 2025.

7 The Hindu, 'Pakistan army says 18 of 26 hostages killed in Balochistan train attack were soldiers' (The Hindu, 14 March 2025) https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/pakistan-army-says-18-of-26-hostages-killed-in-balochistan-train-attack-were-soldiers/article69332752.ece accessed 10 May 2025.

8 The Hindu, 'India denies role in Pakistan train attack' (The Hindu, 14 March 2025) https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-pakistan-terrorism-train-attack/article69328869.ece accessed 11 May 2025.

9 Farhat Javed, 'Pakistan army chief's Kashmir remarks cause anger in India' (BBC News, 30 April 2025) https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c39j3p14mg4o accessed 10 May 2025.

10 Nayanika Sengupta, ''Different from Hindus': What did Pakistan Army chief say days before Pahalgam horror' (Hindustan Times, 23 April 2025) https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/different-from-hindus-pakistan-army-chief-asim-munir-two-nation-theory-jugular-vein-pahalgam-terror-attack-101745382805306.html accessed 1 June 2025.

11 Fayaz Bukhari, 'Militants in Indian Kashmir segregate men from women and children before opening fire' (Reuters, 23 April 2025) https://www.reuters.com/world/india/militants-indian-kashmir-segregate-men-women-children-before-opening-fire-2025-04-23/ accessed 25 May 2025.

12 The Hindu, 'Terrorists kept firing for 25-30 minutes, recalls Pahalgam eyewitness' (The Hindu, 23 April 2025) https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/terrorists-kept-firing-for-25-30-minutes-recalls-pahalgam-eyewitness/article69483296.ece accessed 5 May 2025.

13 The Hindu, 'Pahalgam Terror Attack Victims: Tribute' (The Hindu, 24 April 2025) https://www.thehindu.com/infographics/2025-04-24/pahalgam-terror-attack-victims-tribute/index.html accessed 25 May 2025.

14 M Sudhir Selvaraj, 'A Primer on The Resistance Front, the Group Behind the Pahalgam Attack' (The Diplomat, 30 April 2025) https://thediplomat.com/2025/04/a-primer-on-the-resistance-front-the-group-behind-the-pahalgam-attack/ accessed 25 May 2025.

15 Mukesh Ranjan, 'Lashkar proxy, The Resistance Front, now denies its role in Pahalgam terror attack' (The New Indian Express, 26 April 2025) https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Apr/26/lashkar-proxy-the-resistance-front-now-denies-its-role-in-pahalgam-terror-attack accessed 25 May 2025.

16 Max Abrahms, 'PacNet #35 – The Pahalgam Attack in Kashmir: Why We Should Expect a Forceful Response from India' (Pacific Forum, 2 May 2025) https://pacforum.org/publications/pacnet-35-the-pahalgam-attack-in-kashmir-why-we-should-expect-a-forceful-response-from-india/ accessed 25 May 2025.

17 Safwat Zargar, 'How India's withdrawal from Indus Water Treaty can hurt Pakistan' (Scroll.in, 1 June 2025) https://scroll.in/article/1081724/how-indias-withdrawal-from-indus-water-treaty-can-hurt-pakistan accessed 28 May 2025.

18 Arman Ahmed, 'Regional Reverberations: The Pahalgam Attack and Its Impact on South Asia's Security Landscape' (Australian Institute of International Affairs, 5 May 2025) https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/regional-reverberations-the-pahalgam-attack-and-its-impact-on-south-asias-security-landscape/ accessed 1 June 2025.

19 Dawn.com, 'Trade, ties and flights off-limits as Pakistan retaliates to India's moves' (Dawn, 24 April 2025) https://www.dawn.com/news/1906284/trade-ties-and-flights-off-limits-as-pakistan-retaliates-to-indias-moves accessed 28 May 2025.

20 Ministry of Defence, 'Operation Sindoor: Indian Armed Forces Carried Out Precision Strike at Terrorist Camps' (Press Information Bureau, 7 May 2025) https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2127370 accessed 29 May 2025.

21 Baqir Sajjad Syed, 'Pakistan's army chief Gen Asim Munir says India's actions in Kashmir are "unacceptable" and warns of consequences' (X, 21 April 2025) https://x.com/baqirsajjad/status/1923057726566932892 accessed 28 May 2025.

22 Imogen Piper, Jarrett Ley, Evan Hill, and Maham Javaid, 'At least two Indian jets appear to have

crashed during Pakistan strikes, visuals show' (The Washington Post, 9 May 2025) https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/05/09/fighter-jets-india-pakistan-attack/ accessed 28 May 2025.

[23] Fayaz Bukhari, 'Three fighter jets crashed in India's Jammu and Kashmir, local govt sources say' (Reuters, 7 May 2025) https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/three-fighter-jets-crashed-indias-jammu-kashmir-local-govt-sources-say-2025-05-07/ accessed 1 June 2025.

[24] Christopher Clary, Four Days in May: The India-Pakistan Crisis of 2025 (Stimson Center Working Paper, 28 May 2025) https://www.stimson.org/2025/four-days-in-may-the-india-pakistan-crisis-of-2025/ accessed 1 June 2025

[25] '1st DGMO briefing on# Operation Sindoor?"' (Times Now, X, 11 May 2025) https://x.com/TimesNow/status/1921559229657240039 accessed 15 May 2025.

[26] 'Have India and Pakistan started a drone war?' (Al Jazeera, 8 May 2025) https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/8/have-india-and-pakistan-started-a-drone-war accessed 20 May 2025.

[27] Ministry of External Affairs, Transcript of Special briefing on OPERATION SINDOOR (Press Briefing, 9 May 2025) https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/39482/Transcript_of_Special_briefing_on_OPERATION_SINDOOR_May_09_2025 accessed 14 May 2025.

[28] Kunal Raj, 'Harpy drones used by Indian military to target enemy air defence systems' (The Economic Times, 9 May 2025) https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/harpy-drones-used-by-indian-military-to-target-enemy-air-defence-systems/articleshow/120996897.cms accessed 22 May 2025.

[29] International Monetary Fund, 'IMF Executive Board Completes First Review of the Extended Fund Facility Arrangement with Pakistan and Approves Request for Arrangement under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility' (IMF, 9 May 2025) https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2025/05/09/pr-25137-pakistan-imf-completes-1st-rev-of-eff-arrang-and-approves-req-for-arrang-under-rsf accessed 15 May 2025.

[30] 'Pakistan PMO says IMF has approved $1 billion loan' (The Hindu, 9 June 2025) https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/pakistan-pmo-says-imf-has-approved-1-billion-loan/article69558903.ece accessed 15 May 2025.

[31] Press Information Bureau, 'India's Position at the IMF' (Press Information Bureau, 2025) https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2127998 accessed 15 May 2025.

[32] Kunal Raj, 'India hits key Pakistani military base: What makes Nur Khan crucial?' (LiveMint, May 2025) https://www.livemint.com/news/india-hits-key-pakistani-military-base-what-makes-nur-khan-crucial-11747051654445.html accessed 16 May 2025.

[33] TN Web Desk, 'Pakistan army releases details of "Bunyan-um-Marsoos", terms clashes with India "Marka-e-Haq"' (The News, 12 May 2025) https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/1310899-pakistan-army-releases-details-of-bunyan-um-marsoos-terms-clashes-with-india-marka-e-haq accessed 20 May 2025.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] TN Web Desk, 'Bunyan-um-Marsoos'

[37] Donald J. Trump, 'After a long night of talks mediated by the United States, I am pleased to to announce that India and Pakistan have agreed to a full and immediate ceasefire' (X, 10 May 2025) https://x.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1921174163848401313 accessed 29 May 2025.

[38] Press Information Bureau, 'Global Solidarity with India: A United Front Against Cross-Border Terrorism' (Press Information Bureau, 14 May 2025) https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2128747 accessed 25 May 2025.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Rajesh Rajagopalan and Vipin Narang, 'India's Nuclear Strategy and Deterrence Stability' (2017) 26 Security Studies 563 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09636412.2017.1280304 accessed 18 May 2025.

[41] Rohan Mukherjee, 'Crisis on Repeat: The IMF, Pakistan and Failed Reform' Observer Research Foundation (18 May 2025) https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/crisis-on-repeat-the-imf-pakistan-and-failed-reform accessed 18 May 2025.

[42] Harsh V Pant and Aarshi Tirkey, 'India's Multilateral Approach to Counterterrorism' (2023) Observer Research Foundation https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-multilateral-approach-to-counterterrorism accessed 30 May 2025.

[43] Moeed Yusuf, Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments: U.S. Crisis Management in South Asia (Stanford University Press 2018) https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=28434 accessed 30 May 2025.

Shifting Alliances and Militarisation in South and Southeast Asia

Esm'eralda Marion

Key Takeaways

- Mounting tensions between Delhi, Beijing and Washington continue to shape alliances and shift the security landscape in South and Southeast Asia (SEA) thereby enhancing defence and regional cooperation.

- As the dynamics of power continue to shift, military operations expand to include counter-terrorism programmes, disaster management and maritime security operations, hence the complexity in military engagement.

- Energy and economic corridors as well as maritime security dictate the region's geopolitical balance which remains fragile as countries scramble for alliances and military modernisation.

- The new balance of power gives states more options and leverage to negotiate favourable partnerships that operate on a common ground.

The South and Southeast Asia region is often defined by its diversity, high economic growth rate and strategic significance. However, it is also shaped by territorial disputes which lead to increased militarisation and the aspiration for major powers to flex their muscles. Furthermore, the shrinking civic space in the region brought about by censorship and militarisation, continues to undermine anti-corruption efforts, democratic participation and reform, government accountability and the protection of human rights.

The United States (US) has for years been a major player in the shaping of foreign policy but its influence is being threatened in the current geopolitical landscape where power and influence is much more diffused. The gradual shift in both international and regional relations has seen the rise of China and India in a complex security landscape propelled by disputes and which neither of them has shied away from.

While economic and security integration is likely to fuel power struggles and heighten tensions in the region thereby reshaping the conventional security paradigms, military alliances accentuate the need for holistic approaches in attaining regional stability. This article therefore examines emerging security dynamics and regional integration in the wake of China's regional posturing and evolving alliances in South and Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asia

Although a significant locus in the growing strategic antagonism between Beijing and Washington, Southeast Asia has become more unstable with an upsurge in naval confrontations: a 15% increase in the first quarter of 2025 as opposed to the previous period.[1]

Nonetheless, all SEA states have moderately strong bonds with Beijing including access to the Chinese market. Beijing strives to gain a foothold and challenge US influence in SEA as evidenced through its infrastructure investments and its expansion in security alliances. Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has intertwined the region
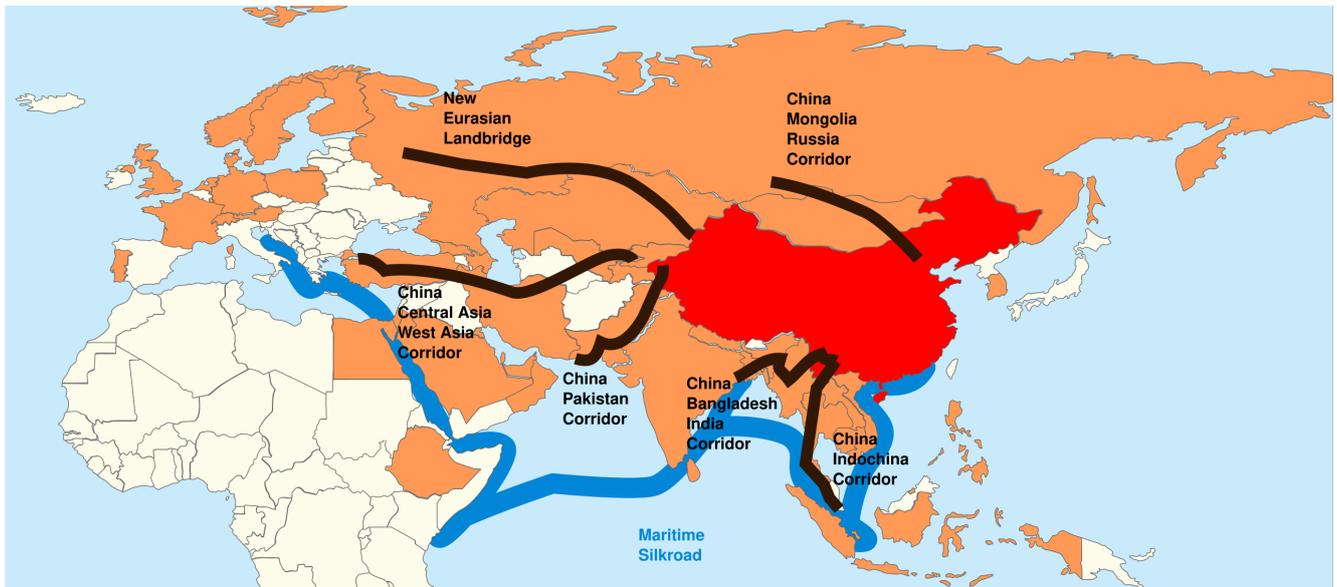
Proposed Belt and Road Initiative. China in Red, the members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in orange. The proposed corridors in black (Land Silk Road), and blue (Maritime Silk Road) (Lommes, Wikimedia Commons 2017)

into a colossal web of infrastructural investments and trade pacts, promoting development while at the same time creating dependencies. As per current estimates, BRI-affiliated investments have resulted in a 5% infrastructural annual increase across the region.[2] However, augmented indebtedness and dependence on Chinese funds affect the bargaining capability of host countries making them more susceptible to political and strategic influence which in turn has substantial impact on national security due to reduced strategic independence.[3]

While the US seeks to reinforce alliances in SEA, China continues to be a strategic player and has strived to amplify its mounting politico-economic influence by tapping into its soft power as is the case with cultural, educational and professional collaborations.[4] For example, Beijing plays a significant role in the construction of hydroelectric plants and solar farms in Cambodia and Laos, amplifying their energy safety while incorporating them into a China-driven economic framework. The BRI has also directed investment into key infrastructure projects such as Indonesia's high-speed railway linking Jakarta to Bandung, the Laos-China Railway (LCR), and Malaysia's East Coast Rail Link.[5]

However, some countries in the region see China as a threat as reported in the 2025 Asia-Pacific Security Summit where more than 60% of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states viewed China as the main threat to economic independence and territorial integrity.[6] For instance, the South China Sea disputes, an epicentre of hostility with territorial feud involving China, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam, threaten trade routes and undermine regional stability as well as the US-China contention which has profound impact on alliances, security and trade.[7] China's mounting tensions present a significant challenge in SEA resulting in countries adopting a leery proactive approach while dealing with Beijing. This is a window of opportunity for the dominant regional contender, the US, to solidify its regional engagement.[8]

With China's maritime aggressiveness, SEA nations pursue security alliances to protect themselves from Beijing's aggression. For instance, Washington has bolstered its defence collaboration with the Philippines, dilating the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) which allows American troops to use central bases close to the contested waters.[9]

The region also experiences other considerable challenges, for example: climate change and its geopolitical balance in which ecological degradation, extreme weather, and rising sea levels revamp strategic interest with Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia facing significant risk thereby prompting partnerships on disaster resilience; economic integration challenges like digitalisation, economic dependency and trade imbalances which impact long-term stability; and political instability as is the case with Malaysia, Myanmar and

Thailand which have significant impact on human rights and the region's stability especially when civil strife spills over.[10]

South Asia

While India continues to be a dominant power in South Asia due to its growing economy, military, scientific, and technological advancement, the growth of China's influence transforms the balance of power and mirrors wider shifts in economic multipolarity, challenging conventional trade dynamics dictated by western powers. For example, Beijing's engagement through its bilateral alliances centred on trade deals have reinforced its place in the region and contested traditional power dynamics hence its major transformation in its foreign policy.

Washington on the other hand has overlooked other countries in the region owing to its affiliation with New Delhi. Delhi's dominance is thus significant in regional and economic security as it upholds bilateral relations with neighbouring states while encountering decades-old geopolitical challenges with Beijing and Islamabad.[11] For instance, Delhi has controlled Thimphu's foreign policy since the 1949 Treaty of Friendship and still retains significant influence. Additionally, it has amassed significant power in Kathmandu through its investments and influence on its economy.[12]

However, more recently there has been a gradual shift against New Delhi in the region. Nations that had enjoyed strong ties with Delhi have swiftly transitioned recently to warming up to Beijing. For example, Muhammad Yunus, Bangladesh's Interim Leader, has sidelined Delhi and instead embraced Beijing which has so far provided billions in assistance and infrastructural projects.[13] Islamabad's significance in the region also challenges India's position as displayed through its alliance with Beijing, its border with India and its strategic position linking South Asia to Central Asia.[14][15] The current India-Pakistan conflict has equally seen Islamabad utilise advanced Chinese air-to-air missiles, defence systems and modern fighter planes.[16]

Bangladesh has similarly evolved into a central role in regional integration, bolstering trade and transport routes with India and SEA whereas Sri Lanka is positioned at a vital maritime intersection and maintains relations with China, India and the US.[17] Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal equally play crucial roles in the region's stability often dictated by Beijing and Delhi's conflicting interests.[18] Furthermore, regional security concerns like insurgency and terrorism complicate military action in the region. South Asia for instance has been an epicentre for non-state armed groups and terrorist organisations thereby impacting regional stability. In addition, the Afghanistan-Pakistan-India-China border tensions stir up disputes in the region.[19]

Militarisation

With militarisation being a global benchmark rooted in comprehensive strategic alliances, balancing the presence of a major power is accompanied with its own challenges. For instance, Beijing's assertiveness in South and Southeast Asia has transformed the military operational landscape in the region prompting increased collaboration amongst states thereby shaping the spheres of influence in the region. For instance, alliances like the Cobra Gold exercises, SEA's longest-standing military exercises which comprise command and control drills, counter-drone strategies, cyber defence, field operations, humanitarian assistance and space operations, portray Washington's position in fostering strategic collaboration.[20]

As part of its attempt to fortify its military and economic dominance, China is meticulously reinforcing its defence industry. Moreover, compared to the US, China has become exceptionally fast in obtaining weapons systems.[21] Beijing therefore aspires to expand its military capability and establish primary control in the region. On top of securing naval

power, Beijing has set out a continuous campaign of creating and militarising artificial islands in the South China Sea.[22] Nevertheless, it has made the reunification of Taiwan a primary focus and has disputed the Philippines' claim over islands in the South China Sea. China's increasing military power therefore poses a potential risk to countries which are forced to boost their defence by collaborating with Beijing's rival, the US, for security.[23] While military capabilities continue to evolve, the role of the military is also expanding to responding to growing challenges like natural disasters and regional disputes.

The guided-missile cruiser USS Shiloh, the US Navy's forward-deployed aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan, and the Republic of Singapore Navy stealth frigate RSS Intrepid steam together in the South China Sea（US Pacific Fleet 2021）

Shifts in Alliances

The rise of China has not only been accompanied by security issues, but also economic wrangles as is the case with the recent tariff war between Washington and Beijing in which President Trump sought to reset the foundations of international trade and saw Beijing reciprocate the tariffs to what was viewed to be a trade embargo and a clear indication of Beijing's influence.[24]

Based on a mid-2025 survey conducted amongst ASEAN defence officials, approximately 72% were in support of a more inclusive security approach that minimised the dependency on any single power.[25] Countries like Indonesia and Malaysia have thus increased counter-terrorism actions to tackle issues which require partnership with neighbouring states. The two countries in collaboration with the Philippines also actively participate in operations against militia groups and piracy in the region. The regional security landscape has also seen Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia develop robust military systems to deal with threats in addition to taking part in multilateral activities which expand military interaction and their efficiency in responding to threats. Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam have similarly strengthened their relations with other partners like the European Union, Japan and India.[26]

Furthermore, following humanitarian fund cuts and a reduction in global development in a region which is regarded as a relatively closed environment for civil society, increased reliance on China for development and the military for humanitarian aid, further isolates the civil society from decision-making and national dialogue. This risks exacerbating corruption, inequalities and repression which further poses a threat to long-term stability in the region.

Conclusion

An arms race in the quest for geopolitical interests in South and Southeast Asia is at the expense of the populations due to growing inequalities, derailed development and curtailed humanitarian support. The civic space has also not been spared as it continues

to shrink in the wake of censorship and authoritarian regimes.

Besides utilising its expanding military prowess to assert its regional foreign policy, China is leveraging alliances with other anti-American nations like Russia to challenge the US' global dominance and coin a new global order with a more prominent role for China. By embedding itself as a key actor in the international sphere, Beijing has given rise to alternative power.

The shift in alliances is therefore a window of opportunity for powers like China and India which are building considerable long-standing strategic partnerships to assert their influence in the region. While military alliances boost might and present a united front against any aggression, militarisation has also fuelled repression and escalated tensions with different factions thereby spiralling conflicts in the region. With militarisation dancing on the edge of fire, the major powers should engage with each other in mutual interest like defence, climate change and regional economic integration thereby avoiding unnecessary hostility which could spiral into a full-scale war.

Policy Recommendations

- ASEAN should institute effective communication channels and a collective operational framework between regional and international bodies in order to enhance communication and cooperation.

- China, India and the US should be at the forefront of backing regional peace and security through diplomacy and mutual engagement as opposed to military intervention in order to safeguard stability and sustainable growth.

- External actors should refrain from getting entangled in conflicts where their main interests are not at risk and instead nudge for arms control in the region.

- Middle powers (allied states) should balance the power dynamics by pursuing mutually beneficial interactions with other nations to reduce their dependence on Beijing, Washington and Delhi.

Endnotes

1 Simon Hutagalung, 'President Trump 2.0, China, And Southeast Asia: Security Challenges And Strategic Dilemmas – OpEd' Eurasia Review (16 March 2025) https://www.eurasiareview.com/16032025-president-trump-2-0-china-and-southeast-asia-security-challenges-and-strategic-dilemmas-oped/ accessed 21 June 2025.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Yizhou Miao, 'China's Southeast Asia Strategy' Foreign Analysis (3 March 2025) https://foreignanalysis.com/chinas-southeast-asia-strategy/ accessed 8 June 2025.

5 Ibid.

6 Simon Hutagalung, 'President Trump 2.0, China, And Southeast Asia: Security Challenges And Strategic Dilemmas – OpEd' Eurasia Review (16 March 2025) https://www.eurasiareview.com/16032025-president-trump-2-0-china-and-southeast-asia-security-challenges-and-strategic-dilemmas-oped/ accessed 21 June 2025.

7 'The Geopolitical Challenges Shaping Southeast Asia in 2025' EGN Peer Network (2025) https://www.egnpeernetwork.com/insights/the-geopolitical-challenges-shaping-southeast-asia-in-2025 accessed 22 June 2025.

8 Yizhou Miao, 'China's Southeast Asia Strategy' Foreign Analysis (3 March 2025) https://foreignanalysis.com/chinas-southeast-asia-strategy/ accessed 8 June 2025.

9 Ibid.

10 'The Geopolitical Challenges Shaping Southeast Asia in 2025' EGN Peer Network (2025) https://www.egnpeernetwork.com/insights/the-geopolitical-challenges-shaping-southeast-asia-in-2025 accessed 22 June 2025.

11 Anuja Kumbhar, 'Geopolitics of South Asia and Indian Ocean Realm' Geographic Book (15 February 2025) https://geographicbook.com/geopolitics-of-south-asia-and-indian-ocean-realm/ accessed 22 May 2025.

12 Joshua Kurlantzick, 'India is Losing South Asia to China' Council on Foreign Relations (28 May 2025) https://www.cfr.org/blog/india-losing-south-asia-china accessed 8 June 2025.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Anuja Kumbhar, 'Geopolitics of South Asia and Indian Ocean Realm' Geographic Book (15 February 2025) https://geographicbook.com/geopolitics-of-south-asia-and-indian-ocean-realm/ accessed 22 May 2025.

16 Joshua Kurlantzick, 'India is Losing South Asia to China' Council on Foreign Relations (28 May 2025) https://www.cfr.org/blog/india-losing-south-asia-china accessed 8 June 2025.

17 Anuja Kumbhar, 'Geopolitics of South Asia and Indian Ocean Realm' Geographic Book (15 February 2025) https://geographicbook.com/geopolitics-of-south-asia-and-indian-ocean-realm/ accessed 22 May 2025.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 'US, Thailand begin Southeast Asia's largest annual military exercises' Reuters via ABS-CBN (25 February 2025) https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/world/2025/2/25/us-thailand-begin-southeast-asias-largest-annual-military-exercises-1519 accessed 22 May 2025.

21 Daniel Byman, 'Improving Cooperation with Allies and Partners in Asia' Center for Strategic & International Studies (20 May 2025) https://www.csis.org/analysis/improving-cooperation-allies-and-partners-asia accessed 22 May 2025.

22 Zane Kheir, 'The US Pivot to Asia Reborn: Old Grand Strategies, New Challenges' The Diplomat (10 January 2025) https://thediplomat.com/2025/01/the-us-pivot-to-asia-reborn-old-grand-strategies-new-challenges/ accessed 22 May 2025.

23 Daniel Byman, 'Improving Cooperation with Allies and Partners in Asia' Center for Strategic & International Studies (20 May 2025) https://www.csis.org/analysis/improving-cooperation-allies-and-partners-asia accessed 22 May 2025.

24 Didi Tang, 'A timeline of the US-China tariff and trade spat since President Trump took office this year' AP News (11 June 2025) https://apnews.com/article/tariff-china-united-states-timeline-b9ade8491a16f68282ad655395c602bc accessed 15 June 2025.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

The New Data Frontiers: How Tech Power Shifts Shape Privacy and Surveillance in Asia

Kedar Bhasme

Key Takeaways

- Asia's rapid digital expansion, with China leading in Artificial Intelligence (AI), biometrics, and smart infrastructure, is making surveillance the default mode of governance. Privacy often gets sidelined, and the consequences for civil liberties are increasingly hard to ignore.

- China's grip on regional tech is no accident. Policies like Made in China, 2025 push a state-first model that sidelines Western-style privacy rules and recasts data governance in its own image, setting up a clash not just of systems, but values.

- The privacy-surveillance trade-off isn't just a domestic headache. With half the world's population in Asia, and United States (US) tech giants drifting closer to Washington's geopolitical script, the region risks becoming a digital powder keg. Tech rivalry, particularly over chips and AI, could easily spill into tariff wars and regulatory brinkmanship.

- India and Southeast Asian countries are stuck threading the needle of promoting digital innovation, enforcing privacy, and keeping the state happy. Some try harder than others, but across the board, enforcement is weak and often symbolic.

- Asia's data future is still in play. The privacy laws mimic the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in form if not function. But without real oversight, uneven rules, rising techno-nationalism, privacy often plays second fiddle to control. Asia's data governance looks less like a unified front and more like patchwork under pressure.

The rise of AI, biometrics, and fifth-generation wireless technology (5G) in Asia, led by China, is reshaping privacy and surveillance. States are leveraging these technologies to enhance control, often at the expense of individual privacy rights. This shift is driven by geopolitical competition, with China's state-centric techno-governance contrasting with rights-based approaches in countries like India and Singapore. Across Asia, varied data protection laws and surveillance practices reflect diverse national priorities. Civil society groups, such as India's Internet Freedom Foundation and Malaysia's Sinar Project, resist excessive surveillance, advocating for stronger data protection. Asia's privacy future depends on balancing security and rights, potentially leading to fragmented or convergent data governance. Recent developments in 2024 and 2025 highlight the maturation of Asia's privacy laws, with many countries enacting or strengthening legislation, while regional initiatives like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Digital Economy Framework Agreement aim to harmonise standards.

While Asia stands as a powerhouse of technological innovation, with China, India, and Southeast Asian nations spearheading advances in AI, biometrics, and 5G, this digital leap forward, however, fuels a surge in state-driven surveillance, often eroding individual privacy rights in the name of security. In 2024 and 2025, a wave of new data protection laws, inspired by global standards like Europe's GDPR, signals Asia's push to balance innovation with privacy. As civil society groups resist overreach and nations navigate geopolitical tensions, Asia's digital evolution is redefining global data governance.

Technological and Geopolitical Landscape in Asia

Asia is undergoing a profound transformation in its technological and geopolitical landscape, driven by rapid advancements in digital technologies and shifting power dynamics. The region's civic space, however, faces significant challenges, with 89% of Asia's population living in countries rated as closed, repressed, or obstructed for civic freedoms, according to the CIVICUS Monitor. Meanwhile, technological advancements, such as China's extensive surveillance systems and AI-driven tools, are increasingly deployed for repression, enabling states to monitor and control dissent, particularly in closed civic spaces like China and Myanmar.[1]

China's technological ascent is underpinned by massive investments in AI, 5G networks, and big data analytics, positioning it as a leader in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.[2][3] The Chinese government has prioritised technological self-reliance through initiatives like Made in China 2025, aiming to dominate key sectors such as semiconductors, AI, and robotics.[4] For instance, DeepSeek, a Chinese AI model founded in 2023, represents a significant advancement through its open-source approach, fostering global developer collaboration while serving China's national technological objectives.[5]

The expansion of US-based tech giants like Google, Facebook, and Amazon has significantly shaped Asia's digital ecosystem, introducing advanced platforms and services. However, concerns over data sovereignty have driven countries like China and India to enforce local data storage and processing policies.[2] For instance, China's WeChat and India's ShareChat serve as alternatives to Facebook, offering localised social networking, while Baidu and Alibaba's Tmall provide search and e-commerce options rivalling Google and Amazon. China's "dual circulation" strategy fosters self-reliance by promoting domestic tech innovation, evident in initiatives like Made in China 2025, which strengthens local firms.[6] This shift forges new technological alliances, such as China's partnerships with Southeast Asian nations through the Belt and Road Initiative's digital infrastructure projects, redefining the Indo-Pacific's tech landscape.

Indeed, digital infrastructure development is another critical aspect of Asia's tech transformation.[7] Countries are investing heavily in building smart cities, expanding broadband connectivity, and deploying 5G networks. China has rolled out an extensive 5G network, while India is advancing its Digital India initiative to enhance digital connectivity and services.[8] These developments enhance economic productivity but also enable sophisticated surveillance and data collection, as seen in India's Aadhaar system, where biometric data misuse has sparked significant privacy concerns.[9]

The interplay between technology and geopolitics in Asia is complex, with technology serving as both a tool for economic growth and a means of exerting political control.[10] As states, particularly the US and China, compete for technological dominance,[11] the delicate balance between privacy and surveillance intensifies, with significant implications for civil liberties and regional stability in Asia, home to over four billion people, or roughly 50% of the global population in 2025. The close alignment of US tech giants with the Trump administration heightens the risk of tech competition escalating into geopolitical tensions, potentially destabilizing the Indo-Pacific through trade disputes, tariff wars, and strategic tech export controls, as evidenced by ongoing US-China rivalry over semiconductors and AI.[12]

Case Studies: Varying Models of Techno-Governance
China: State-Centric Surveillance

China exemplifies a state-centric model of techno-governance, leveraging advanced technologies to maintain social order and political control. Its surveillance network includes over 700 million cameras by August 2023, with 40,000 in Xinjiang tracking Uyghurs via the Integrated Joint Operations Platform.[13][14] China mandates foreign companies, like Apple, to store data locally and provide government access, reinforcing state control over

information processing. This measure could protect citizens' data in other nations if applied with privacy-first motives but in China prioritizes state interests. State-sponsored hacking groups like Weaver Ant and Mustang Panda deploy malware, such as those used to target India's power grid in 2021 and steal intellectual property from Japanese firms, posing domestic and international cyber espionage threats.[15][16] Laws like the Cybersecurity Law (2017), Data Security Law (2021), and Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL, 2021) enable broad state access to data, with the Regulations on Network Data Security Management (effective January 1, 2025) imposing strict compliance for large datasets.[17] Critics have highlighted privacy violations, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, when health data from mobile apps and digital barcodes was used for mass tracking, raising concerns about excessive surveillance, forced isolation and lack of consent.[18]

India: Hybrid Models with Public-Private Partnerships

India employs a hybrid model of techno-governance through public-private partnerships, exemplified by the Aadhaar biometric identification system, covering over 1.3 billion citizens, and the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), where private companies provide payment infrastructure under government oversight.[19] The Digital Personal Data Protection Act Rules seek to balance innovation and privacy. However, it faces criticism for provisions allowing government access to data for national security, which lack clear conditions, transparency, and accountability, potentially enabling unchecked surveillance.[20] Civil society groups, notably the Internet Freedom Foundation, actively shapes governance by challenging overreach through litigation and advocating for stronger privacy safeguards. However, weak enforcement has led to breaches,[21] such as the 2018 Aadhaar data leaks[22] exposing personal details of millions, raising human rights concerns over privacy violations and exclusion from services like food rations due to authentication failures.

In India, the burgeoning digital economy leverages vast data for innovation, but weak enforcement mechanisms lead to breaches and misuse. The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) aims to create an inclusive digital economy, yet requires robust privacy safeguards.[23]

Aadhaar Card biometric data (BMN Network 2017)

Southeast Asia: Diverse Approaches

Southeast Asia's techno-governance models vary starkly, with ASEAN's 2025 Digital Economy Framework Agreement seeking unified data standards.[33] Singapore's Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA), updated in 2024, enforces strict fines for breaches, like a SGD 54,000 penalty on a ferry operator, prioritising oversight over localisation.[24] Vietnam's Decree 53/2022/ND-CP mandates local data storage for telecom and e-commerce, curbing

cross-border flows to bolster state control.[25] Indonesia adopts protectionist stances, with Regulation No. 71/2019 mandating local data storage.[26] Myanmar's 2025 Cybersecurity Law enables mass surveillance by banning Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), crushing privacy and freedom of speech.[27] These divergent approaches challenge ASEAN's goal of cohesive regional data governance.

Political Economy of Data

The commodification of personal information, often termed the "new oil," is central to Asia's digital economy. In China, the Data Security Law (2021) positions data as a strategic asset for national security and economic growth, outpacing regulatory frameworks and raising human rights concerns as states prioritize technological dominance over privacy.[28] Chinese tech giants like Alibaba and Tencent, mandated to share data with the government under laws like the Cybersecurity Law (2017), fuel both commercial innovation and state surveillance, amplifying privacy risks.[29][30] DeepSeek's integration into China's digital ecosystem highlights its potential to boost the Social Credit System by analysing massive datasets to monitor and shape citizen behaviour. This shows how fast-moving tech developments often skip safeguards, putting state control and global tech competition ahead of individual rights.[31]

Civil Society and Normative Resistance

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are crucial in advocating for digital rights and privacy in Asia, despite a shrinking civic space where 89% of the region's population lives in countries with closed, repressed, or obstructed civic freedoms, per the CIVICUS Monitor.[1] In India, the Internet Freedom Foundation uses Supreme Court petitions to challenge government overreach, such as Aadhaar data misuse.[32] Malaysia's Sinar Project[33] monitors state surveillance, exposing tools like the Pegasus spyware used to target activists. Indonesia's SAFENet[34] supports digital rights defenders against online harassment, driving legislative progress like Singapore's PDPA updates (2024) and Indonesia's Personal Data Protection Law (2022), with strict penalties. Yet, new technologies enable repression, as seen in

Data Security Breach (blogtrepreneur.com/tech 2016)

Thailand's use of the 2022 Ministerial Decree to censor online dissent[35] and Myanmar's 2025 Cybersecurity Law banning VPNs, stifling free expression[36]. Regional initiatives like the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (2025)[37] promote rights-based data governance, but enforcement gaps, such as Vietnam's vague Decree 53/2022/ND-CP[38] undermine progress.

Conclusion

This research highlights the profound impact of technological advancements on privacy and surveillance in Asia. China's state-centric model, leveraging AI and biometrics, sets a precedent influencing regional practices, while India and Southeast Asian countries develop hybrid models balancing innovation and privacy. The commodification of data, intertwined with national security and global regulatory pressures, complicates the landscape. Civil society resistance and maturing privacy laws offer hope, but challenges such as enforcement gaps persist. Asia faces a critical juncture: its path toward fragmentation or a rights-based framework will shape global data politics. Balancing innovation, security, and privacy requires collaborative efforts from states, corporations, and civil society.

Policy Recommendations

- Asian countries should enact robust data protection laws aligned with GDPR but tailored to local contexts, prioritizing individual privacy while defining clear scope, transparent processes, and strict accountability mechanisms for security-related data access and oversight in national security exemptions.

- Enhance ASEAN collaboration to develop harmonised data governance frameworks, prioritising the 2025 Digital Economy Framework Agreement for cross-border data flows and privacy.

- States should bolster cybersecurity by investing in threat detection systems, conducting regular audits of critical infrastructure, and enforcing breach notification requirements, to protect critical infrastructure and personal data against cyber espionage and breaches.

- Encourage collaboration between governments, academia, and the private sector to develop privacy-enhancing technologies such as differential privacy, homomorphic encryption, and federated learning, along with secure data-sharing mechanisms like data clean rooms and trusted execution environments.

- Data protection authorities, in collaboration with civil society groups and educational institutions, should design and launch sustained public awareness campaigns on data rights and digital privacy. These campaigns should target students, workers, and vulnerable groups through schools, workplaces, and community outreach, using clear, accessible language. Authorities should focus on rights under national data laws and practical steps individuals can take to protect their information.

- Develop ethical guidelines for AI and biometric technologies to prevent misuse and ensure human rights compliance including privacy, freedom from discrimination, and the right to fair treatment.

Endnotes

1 CIVICUS, 'Global Findings 2024' (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024) https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2024/ accessed 3 June 2025.

2 H Gu, 'Data, Big Tech, and the New Concept of Sovereignty' (2024) 29 Journal of Chinese Political Science 591 https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-023-09855-1 accessed 3 June 2025.

3 Robert D Atkinson, 'China Is Rapidly Becoming a Leading Innovator in Advanced Industries' (ITIF, 16 September 2024) https://itif.org/publications/2024/09/16/china-is-rapidly-becoming-a-leading-innovator-in-advanced-industries/ accessed 3 June 2025.

4 ISDP, 'Made in China 2025' (ISDP, June 2018) https://www.isdp.eu/publication/made-china-2025/ accessed 3 June 2025.

5 Kedar Bhasme, 'DeepSeek AI: China's Open-Source Challenge to Western Technological Dominance' (2025) Issue 4 Indo-Pacific Peace and Security Monitor (March 2025) https://peacehumanity.org/peace-and-security-monitor-the-indo-pacific-issue-4-march-2025/ accessed 3 June 2025.

6 Frank Tang, 'What is China's Dual Circulation Economic Strategy and Why is it Important?' (South China Morning Post, 19 November 2020) https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3110184/what-chinas-dual-circulation-economic-strategy-and-why-it accessed 3 June 2025.

7 Yoonee Jeong and Christine Apikul, 'Digital Technology: Evolution and Development in Asia' (Asian Development Bank, 5 May 2025) https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/1052731/adpr2025bn-digital-technology-evolution-development-asia.pdf accessed 3 June 2025.

8 Telecom Review, 'How Tech Investments are Accelerating Asia's Digital Economy' (8 July 2024) https://www.telecomreviewasia.com/news/featured-articles/4382-how-tech-investments-are-accelerating-asia-s-digital-economy/ accessed 3 June 2025.

9 AMLEGALS, 'Data Privacy in the Context of Aadhaar and India's Digital Identity Systems' (16 October 2024) https://amlegals.com/data-privacy-in-the-context-of-aadhaar-and-indias-digital-identity-systems/ accessed 18 June 2025.

10 Dr Srinivasan Gopal Chari, 'Power, Pixels and Politics: The Geopolitics of Emerging Technologies in the Digital Age' (2025) 25(2) London Journal of Research in Humanities & Social Science https://journalspress.com/LJRHSS_Volume25/Power-Pixels-and-Politics-The-Geopolitics-of-Emerging-Technologies-in-the-Digital-Age.pdf accessed 3 June 2025.

11 O D Sweidan, 'The Geopolitics of Technology: Evidence from the Interaction between the United States and China' (2024) 10(2) Russian Journal of Economics 130 https://doi.org/10.32609/j.ruje.10.118505 accessed 3 June 2025.

12 Misha Glenny and Robert Muggah, 'Big Tech Is a Tool of Trump's Global Disruption' (Foreign Policy, 3 June 2025) https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/06/03/trump-big-tech-companies-silicon-valley-threat-geopolitics-digital-sovereignty/ accessed 19 June 2025.

13 Voss, W. and Emmanuel Pernot-Leplay (2023) "China Data Flows and Power in the Era of Chinese Big Tech", Northwestern Journal of International Law and Business, Vol. 44, Issue 2 (Winter 2024) https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1896&context=njilb accessed 3 June 2025.

14 Chamila Liyanage, 'Tyranny of City Brain: How China Implements Artificial Intelligence to Upgrade its Repressive Surveillance Regime' (Fall 2024) 4(3) Journal of Illiberalism Studies 73 https://doi.org/10.53483/XCQW3581 accessed 3 June 2025.

15 Ravie Lakshmanan, 'Chinese Cyber Espionage Targets Telecom Operators in Asia Since 2021' (The Hacker News, 20 June 2024) https://thehackernews.com/2024/06/chinese-cyber-espionage-targets-telecom.html accessed 3 June 2025.

16 Jonathan Greig, 'Chinese Hackers Spent Four Years Inside Asian Telco's Networks' (The Record, 25 March 2025) https://therecord.media/chinese-hackers-spent-years-telco accessed 3 June 2025.

17 Giulia Interesse, 'China Issues New Regulations on Network Data Security Management, Effective January 1, 2025' (China Briefing, 2 October 2024) https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-issues-new-regulations-on-network-data-security-management-effective-january-1-2025/ accessed 3 June 2025.

18 Jun Liu and Hui Zhao, 'Privacy Lost: Appropriating Surveillance Technology in China's Fight Against COVID-19' (2021) 64(6) Business Horizons 743 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2021.07.004 accessed 10 June 2025.

19 PIB Delhi, 'Government of India Taking Measures to Enhance the Reach of Indian Digital Public Infrastructure' (Press Information Bureau, 26 July 2024) https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2037598 accessed 3 June 2025.

20 Rubayya Tasneem and Injila Muslim Zaidi, 'The Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules: Surveillance for Surveillance's Sake' (Internet Freedom Foundation, 17 January 2025) https://internetfreedom.in/the-draft-digital-personal-data-protection-rules-surveillance-for-surveillances-sake/ accessed 10 June 2025.

21 Sunainaa Chadha, '87% Indians Fear Data Breach, 50% Worried About Aadhaar Security: Survey' (Business Standard, 4 March 2025) https://www.business-standard.com/finance/personal-finance/87-indians-fear-data-breach-50-worried-about-aadhaar-security-survey-125030400164_1.html accessed 3 June 2025.

22 Yogesh Sapkale, 'Aadhaar Data Breach Largest in the World, Says WEF's Global Risk Report and Avast'

(Moneylife, 19 February 2019) https://www.moneylife.in/article/aadhaar-data-breach-largest-in-the-world-says-wefs-global-risk-report-and-avast/56384.html accessed 10 June 2025.

23 PIB Delhi, 'Revolutionizing Digital Commerce: The ONDC Initiative' (Press Information Bureau, 4 January 2025) https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2090097 accessed 3 June 2025.

24 Personal Data Protection Commission Singapore, 'Breach of the Protection Obligation by Horizon Fast Ferry' (2 August 2019) https://www.pdpc.gov.sg/all-commissions-decisions/2019/08/breach-of-the-protection-obligation-by-horizon-fast-ferry accessed 3 June 2025.

25 International Trade Administration, 'Vietnam: Cybersecurity Data Localization Requirements' (n.d.) https://www.trade.gov/market-intelligence/vietnam-cybersecurity-data-localization-requirements accessed 3 June 2025.

26 Jagamaya, 'Understanding Indonesia's PP 71/2019: What It Means for Your Data' (22 April 2025) https://jagamaya.com/understanding-indonesias-pp-71-2019-what-it-means-for-your-data/ accessed 3 June 2025.

27 Andy Leck, 'Myanmar: Cybersecurity Law Enacted on 1 January 2025' (Baker McKenzie Connect On Tech, 28 March 2025) https://connectontech.bakermckenzie.com/myanmar-cybersecurity-law-enacted-on-1-january-2025/ accessed 3 June 2025.

28 Alex He, 'State-Centric Data Governance in China' (Centre for International Governance Innovation, September 2023) CIGI Papers No 282 https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/no.282.pdf accessed 3 June 2025.

29 Annabelle Liang, 'Chinese Internet Giants Hand Algorithm Data to Government' (BBC News, 16 August 2022) https://www.bbc.com/news/business-62544950 accessed 3 June 2025.

30 Liza Lin and Josh Chin, 'China's Tech Giants Have a Second Job: Helping Beijing Spy on Its People' (The Wall Street Journal, 30 November 2017) https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-tech-giants-have-a-second-job-helping-the-government-see-everything-1512056284 accessed 3 June 2025.

31 Jonathan Sumner, 'The Great AI Race: China, Deepseek, and the Global Quest for Supremacy – and Its Risks' (GRC World Forums, 18 February 2025) https://www.grcworldforums.com/risk-digital-eu/uk/the-great-ai-race-china-deepseek-and-the-global-quest-for-supremacy-and-its-risks/10037.article accessed 3 June 2025.

32 Joanne DCunha, 'The Madras HC Allows Our Intervention in the Aadhaar and Social Media Linking Petition' (Internet Freedom Foundation, 27 June 2019) https://internetfreedom.in/aadhaar-linking/ accessed 3 June 2025.

33 Sinar Project https://sinarproject.org/ accessed 3 June 2025.

34 Safenet Indonesia https://safenet.or.id/ accessed 3 June 2025.

35 Mong Palatino, 'Thailand's New Ministerial Decree Could Further Suppress Free Speech Online' (Global Voices Advox, 14 January 2023) https://advox.globalvoices.org/2023/01/14/thailands-new-ministerial-decree-could-further-suppress-free-speech-online/ accessed 3 June 2025.

36 Human Rights Myanmar, 'Myanmar's Cyber Law a Serious Threat to Privacy, Speech, and Security' (Progressive Voice Myanmar, 13 January 2025) https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2025/01/13/myanmars-cyber-law-a-serious-threat-to-privacy-speech-and-security/ accessed 3 June 2025.

37 World Economic Forum, 'Why ASEAN's New Digital Economy Framework Agreement Is a Game-Changer' (26 May 2025) https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/05/asean-digital-economy-framework-agreement-a-gamechanger/ accessed 3 June 2025.

38 Freedom House, 'Vietnam: Freedom on the Net – Key Developments, June 1, 2023 – May 31, 2024' (2024) https://freedomhouse.org/country/vietnam/freedom-net/2024 accessed 3 June 2025.

Challenges to Earthquake Relief Delivery in Myanmar Amid Military Control

Phoo Wai Yan Myint

Key Takeaways

- Myanmar has already experienced a humanitarian crisis as a result of pre-existing conflict, further compounded by the earthquake.

- The unpreparedness for the earthquake, and the blocking of humanitarian aid of the ruling authorities resulted in several deaths and losses.

- The massive collapse of the infrastructure led to delayed aid delivery.

- Despite declaring a state of emergency, the State Administration Council (SAC) had no rescue plan, obstructed aid flows in opposition-held areas like Sagaing, and revealed their core priorities of consolidating their power and regime over addressing humanitarian needs.

On 28 March 2025, at 12:51 pm, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake hit Myanmar, with its epicentre located ten miles west of Sagaing. Several aftershocks- as strong as 6.4 magnitude – followed 11 minutes later, with mild tremors felt as far as Bangkok, Thailand. The natural disaster resulted in numerous casualties and fatalities, estimated to a total of 8,500, while some data remains underreported and unverified in Myanmar.

Myanmar lies on a tectonic fault line, making it highly prone to earthquakes. The country has experienced several significant seismic events across different regions throughout its history, including the 1912 Maymyo earthquake and others that struck Bago, Bagan, Sagaing, and Yangon throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.[1] Despite this history, the country has consistently lacked preparedness and disaster response systems have remained underdeveloped, resulting in thousands of people dying and severe damage to infrastructure.

The impact of the latest earthquake has been amplified by the existing humanitarian crisis and conflict, driven by political and economic instability which the people of Myanmar have been facing.

This article investigates the multifaceted impacts of the earthquake, focusing on institutional negligence in disaster preparedness and the exacerbation of conditions due to hindered humanitarian response efforts.
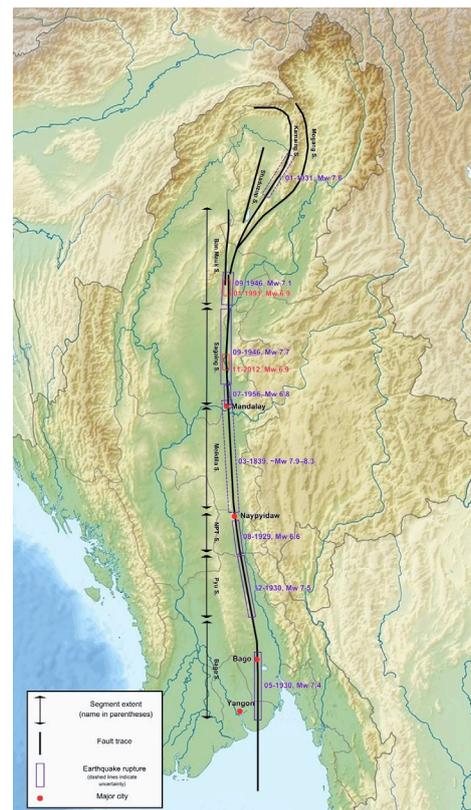
Sagaing Fault with annotated segments and earthquake rupture lengths. An adaptation of the figure in Wang et. al (2014) (Dora the Axe-plorer, Wikimedia Commons 2024)

Damage Caused by the Earthquake

The earthquake cost 3,700 deaths, injured 4,800, and left 129 missing – with the death toll continuing to rise.[2] The earthquake severely damaged critical infrastructure across multiple sectors: transportation (103 bridges, 83 railway segments, 11 railway bridges), communications (6,730 mobile stations), power (10 transmission lines, 3,435 towers). Additionally, many schools and hospitals were affected. This widespread destruction has left people struggling to access basic necessities. Similarly, temples, stupas, and religious buildings were demolished by the earthquake.[3]

After-Effects of the Earthquake

The damage caused by the earthquake has had far-reaching and compounding consequences, disrupting not only immediate relief efforts but also critical sectors that sustain people's everyday lives. In particular, food security, access to healthcare, economic stability, and internal displacement have all been deeply affected. This would result in harsh conditions for the people of Myanmar who lost their homes and livelihoods over the coming months and years.

Screenshot of a video from China News Service that shows the aftermath of the 2025 Myanmar earthquake (China News Service 2025)

Economic Sector

The collapse of infrastructure has severely disrupted and delayed the delivery of aid and trade in the region. Power lines, irrigation systems, and storage facilities were rendered inoperable. This led to businesses facing supply shortage, factory closure, and job losses, etc. which in turn resulted in decline in productivity and trade, a sharp blow to household incomes and food security.

Undoubtedly, both macroeconomic and microeconomic sectors will be in distress, leading to a more drastic poverty and lack of human capacity. According to the Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) Report from the World Bank, the total direct economic damage is projected at US$ 10.97 billion, approximately equivalent to 14% of Myanmar's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the 2024-2025 financial year.[4] Obstructions of infrastructure, supply chains, logistics, and a 14% loss in GDP can steer a more adverse financial instability and inflation along with the shortages of food, fuel, and other basic commodities.

Since before the earthquake, the country has been embroiled in civil war and mass displacement crises across the country and to other nations due to conflicts, human rights abuses, and conscription laws. Thus, the human capacity has dwindled significantly during

the last five years. Youth, once a backbone of social resilience and grassroot recovery efforts[5] have fled to other countries because of political instability and lack of assurance for their future. The economic disruption, infrastructure loss, and dwindling human capacity signal not just temporary torment but long-lasting setbacks to the country's capacity to recover, govern, or develop sustainably. Unless the situation is handled wisely, the country will be locked in a cycle of poverty, instability, and dependency for years to come.

Food Insecurity and Healthcare Insufficiency

Malnutrition becomes a mounting concern for the people in Myanmar. The damage to the irrigation systems has resulted in the failure of agriculture and production of paddies and vegetables, further reducing an already inadequate amount of food for the country, especially in the earthquake-affected areas. According to the World Food Programme, an estimated 2.8 million people are severely affected by food insecurity and facing a hunger crisis as an outcome of the quake. These will add to the 15.2 million people who were already facing famine – driven by the political crisis, conflict, poverty, natural disasters, and economic contraction.[6]

In addition, the seismic activity has contaminated water, making people in the affected areas suffer from water-borne diseases, diarrhoea and gastrointestinal problems.[7] Despite this critical situation, the depleted healthcare system has been overwhelmed due to the lack of healthcare facilities and medical doctors. Since the 2021 military takeover, many healthcare workers such as doctors and nurses, have taken part in the Civil Disobedience Movement, and some of them are now under arrest, fleeing or forbidden from practice. Shortages of medical equipment and human resources also brought about a high number of avoidable deaths during the earthquake.[8]

Displacement

Displacement is not a new trend to Myanmar anymore. People in Myanmar have had to flee their homes. Before the earthquake, there were over 3.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to ongoing conflict. Regions near the epicentre, such as Sagaing, are hosting nearly half of these IDPs, placing immense strain on already vulnerable communities.[9] There has been an urgent need for humanitarian aid for these victims.

After the devastating earthquake hit Myanmar, more than 40,000 people are living in 145 temporary shelters that are not resistant to severe weather conditions such as heavy rain and extreme heat.[10] With the monsoon season approaching, these makeshift shelters offer little to no protection against the weather. The situation is especially dire for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Humanitarian agencies are also calling

Screenshot of a video from China News Service that shows the aftermath of the 2025 Myanmar earthquake (China News Service 2025)

for international support, otherwise, thousands could be pushed deeper into suffering. This unfolding crisis underscores the urgent need not only for immediate relief, but for a long-term strategy that ensures the recovery and safety of the communities.

Response

No sooner had the earthquake caused numerous casualties than the local community and philanthropic organisations started to rescue the people from the rubble, without equipment but their bare hands.[11] Despite Myanmar being historically prone to intense seismic activity and increases in military spending for "national stability", the military junta has had no budget dedicated to disaster relief.[12] The absence of prior framework or logistics plan or specialised equipment severely delayed the rescue operations. With limited resources and no formal training in the community as well as a slow official response, local civil society groups stepped in to search for survivors, distributing food and medicine, and offering psychological and emotional support for the traumatised people.

Although local communities have contributed to these endeavours and efforts, the junta conducted airstrikes in Naung Cho, Northern Shan state in less than three hours after the earthquake, killing at least seven people. Aerial bombing was also reported in north-western Sagaing despite being at the epicentre of the earthquake. Other airstrikes were also carried out in Thai border regions.[13]

Faced with a lack of rescue equipment, the SAC declared a state of emergency and appealed for international aid. Several countries offered to provide assistance with relief efforts, personnel, and financial aid. However, the SAC was selective in accepting assistance from foreign countries, leaning towards those in support of the junta. The SAC was for instance more likely to accept rescue forces from Bangladesh, China, India, Malaysia, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. On the other hand, an offer of assistance from Taiwan search-and-rescue team, although experienced in earthquake relief, was turned down.[14] This selective receiving of assistance highlights the politicisation of humanitarian response in Myanmar with severe consequences on the affected population.

Damage to Mandalay Palace after the March 2025 earthquake (Wikimedia Commons 2025)

In spite of the international community mobilising to support relief efforts, the lack of coordination and preparedness from the authorities drastically hampered the effectiveness of aid delivery. Such failures in preparedness are alarming, especially for a country sitting on a fault line, and with the next major earthquake drawing near. The international relief efforts suffered from the lack of coordination on the ground by the authorities, resulting in inefficiency of aid delivery to the worst-hit areas. The slow responses and overly bureaucratic procedures, for instance border checkpoints delaying rescue teams and operations, negatively affected relief efforts in the critical 72-hours window.

In many cases, relief teams were not given access to affected zones or were sent out without guidance. In some areas, the internet was blocked and people could not receive or share information about the needs and conditions on the ground. Oftentimes, this led to duplication of aid in some areas and total neglect in others. The SAC is allegedly not distributing aid in areas out of its control, such as Sagaing, one of the regions controlled by the People's Defense Forces (PDFs),[15] thus complicating relief efforts. This sheds light on the junta's political priority over humanitarian response.[16]

Conclusion

The pre-existing civil war, the previous natural disasters such as Cyclone Mocha, Typhoon Yagi, and now the earthquake, are exacerbating the crises and crashing the nation into pieces. The blockage of humanitarian aid also revealed that the regime is more focused on consolidating power than on responding to a national emergency, and that is deepening the crisis for vulnerable populations.

The 2025 earthquake needs long-term rehabilitation - not only in terms of infrastructure and material recovery, but also in rebuilding the lives and well-being of its people. The disaster has exposed the deep-rooted political neglect, chronic unpreparedness, and fragility of Myanmar at socio-economic level. Systemic restrictions and the collapse of logistical infrastructure have undermined aid delivery, creating further challenges for both survivors and rescuers. As Myanmar's economy worsens and mass displacement increases, the lack of access to basic necessities continues to drive the country deeper into crisis. This is not merely about the collapse of the country, but of lives being trapped under the weight of failed leadership.

Policy Recommendations

- Humanitarian aid channels must remain neutral and independent, in line with the core principles enshrined in the International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Aid should not be politicised, militarised, or overly centralised, it should reach the victims through decentralised, community-informed mechanisms with minimal bureaucracy.

- The country should develop an independent and inclusive Disaster Response Task Force, involving civil society, and ethnic service providers, with an emphasis on warning systems, emergency evacuation planning, and public education campaigns to raise awareness and reduce casualties in future disasters.

- International organisations should guarantee transparency when providing funds or humanitarian aid via SAC to the civilians, in order to verify that assistance reaches the victims and does not support the military apparatus.

- Whether under SAC, PDFs or ethnic resistance organisations-ruling, the de facto authorities must uphold the rights of civilians and not deny humanitarian aid to the populations, allowing aid corridors and safe zones during natural disasters.

Endnotes

[1] Kavi M, 'Seismic Shifts: A Timeline of Myanmar's Deadliest Quake Disasters' (The Irrawaddy, 2 May 2025) https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/seismic-shifts-a-timeline-of-myanmars-deadliest-quake-disasters.html accessed 20 May 2025.

[2] Mishra V, 'Myanmar: Thousands Remain in Crisis Weeks after Deadly Earthquakes | UN News' (United Nations, 18 April 2025) https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1162401 accessed 24 May 2025.

[3] Xinhua, 'Widespread Damage Reported after Myanmar's Earthquake' (Xinhua, 30 May 2025) https://english.news.cn/asiapacific/20250530/a49ccc79e3624d4f91d03e529bf297f0/c.html#:~:text=The%20quake%20caused%20severe%20destruction,transmission%20towers%2C%20the%20report%20said accessed 30 May 2025.

[4] 'Worldbank' (World Bank Group, 29 May 2025) https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/ba4aa1f7-c7b8-5177-a1c3-75f7e6df15a1/content accessed 30 May 2025.

[5] 'Myanmar Youth Volunteers on the Front-Line of Emergency Flood Response' (UNFPA Asiapacific, 20 August 2015) https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/news/myanmar-youth-volunteers-front-line-emergency-flood-response accessed 21 May 2025.

[6] 'Myanmar: World Food Programme' (UN World Food Programme) https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/myanmar-emergency accessed 26 May 2025.

[7] 'Destitution and Disease Stalk Myanmar's Quake Survivors | UN News' (United Nations, 25 April 2025) https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/11 accessed 21 May 2025.

[8] Lone W, McPherson P and Naing S, 'Few Doctors, Throttled Aid: How Myanmar's Junta Worsened Earthquake Toll | Reuters' (Reuters, 7 May 2025) https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/few-doctors-throttled-aid-how-myanmars-junta-worsened-earthquake-toll-2025-05-07/ accessed 20 May 2025.

[9] 'Myanmar Earthquake' (UNHCR Hong Kong, April 2025) https://www.unhcr.org/hk/en/emergencies/myanmar-earthquake#:~:text=Donate%20now-,15%20million,earthquake%2C%20including%20forcibly%20displaced%20people. accessed 22 May 2025.

[10] 'Situation Update No. 9 - M7.7 Mandalay Earthquake - 14 April 2025' (AHA Centre, 15 April 2025) https://ahacentre.org/situation-update/situation-update-no-9-m7-7-mandalay-earthquake-14-april-2025/ accessed 21 May 2025.

[11] Ratcliffe R and J E, '"No One Came": Myanmar Volunteers Dig with Bare Hands to Save Earthquake Victims' (The Guardian, 29 March 2025) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/mar/29/myanmar-volunteers-dig-earthquake-victims accessed 22 June 2025.

[12] The Irrawaddy, 'Editorial: Deliver Earthquake Aid to the Myanmar People, Not the War Criminals' (The Irrawaddy, 8 April 2025) https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/editorial/deliver-earthquake-aid-to-the-myanmar-people-not-the-war-criminals.html accessed 18 May 2025.

[13] Henschke R, 'Junta Continues Air Strikes after Devastating Myanmar Quake' (BBC News, 29 March 2025) https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy7x7r8m3xlo accessed 18 May 2025.

[14] Younger H, 'Myanmar Turns down Taiwan Quake Rescue Offer' (Taipei Times, 30 March 2025) https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2025/03/31/2003834378 accessed 21 May 2025.

[15] Kachin News Group, 'PDF Captures Five Villages in Homalin Township, Sagaing Region' (Burma News International, 29 November 2024) https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/pdf-captures-five-villages-homalin-township-sagaing-region accessed 17 May 2025.

[16] San H, 'In Myanmar, a Disaster in a War Zone Means a Slow and Difficult Aid Response' (The New Humanitarian, 25 April 2025) https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2025/04/22/myanmar-disaster-conflict-war-zone-means-slow-difficult-aid-response#:~:text=The%20military%20junta%20issued%20a,the%20town%20in%20early%20April accessed 18 May 2025.