

# Crisis as Catalyst

Pakistan's Internal Political Transformation, 2025–2026



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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is the second in the series and shifts from hardware to power. It examines how the April–May 2025 crisis with India catalyzed the Pakistan Army's consolidation of domestic control under Asim Munir. Tracking developments chronologically across three fronts- military, political, and judicial- it argues that the crisis let Munir move from expanding power within Pakistan's hybrid system to changing the system itself. It follows the arc from Munir's contested 2022 accession through the May 9, 2023 backlash, the jailing and electoral suppression of Imran Khan's PTI, the 26th and 27th Amendments, his elevation to Field Marshal and the new Chief of Defense Forces role, and the gutting of the Supreme Court. A closing section shows how Munir converted this into a personalized foreign policy built on rapport with Donald Trump. It deliberately excludes terrorism analysis, non-state actors, and Pakistan's economic and India policy as such.

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## AUTHOR

Bashir Ali Abbas, Senior Research Associate, CSDR

## Abbreviations

ACM — Air Chief Marshal  
BLA — Balochistan Liberation Army  
CDF — Chief of Defense Forces  
CJCSC — Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee  
CJP — Chief Justice of Pakistan  
COAS — Chief of Army Staff  
DG-ISI — Director General, Inter-Services Intelligence  
DG-ISPR — Director General, Inter-Services Public Relations  
DGMO — Director General Military Operations  
EFF — Extended Fund Facility (IMF)  
FWO — Frontier Works Organization  
GHQ — General Headquarters (Pakistan Army)  
IBO — Intelligence-Based Operation  
IMF — International Monetary Fund  
ISKP — Islamic State Khorasan Province  
KP — Khyber Pakhtunkhwa  
MNA — Member of the National Assembly  
MQM-P — Muttahida Qaumi Movement (Pakistan)  
NSC — National Security Committee  
PAF — Pakistan Air Force  
PML(N) — Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)  
PPP — Pakistan Peoples Party  
PTI — Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf  
SCP — Supreme Court of Pakistan  
SIC — Sunni Ittehad Council  
SIFC — Special Investment Facilitation Council  
TRF — The Resistance Front  
TTP — Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan  
USSM — U.S. Strategic Metals  
WLF — World Liberty Financial

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The April–May 2025 conflict with India was the hinge on which Pakistan's internal politics turned. This paper argues that the crisis did not create Asim Munir's ambitions so much as provide the legitimacy he needed to act on them, allowing the Army to shift from expanding its power within Pakistan's hybrid system to remaking the system itself. It tracks that shift chronologically across the military, political, and judicial fronts, from late 2022 to mid-2026.

Before the crisis, Munir governed defensively. Inheriting a TTP and Baloch insurgency and, more dangerously, a popular street movement led by the jailed Imran Khan, he leaned on familiar tools: the Special Investment Facilitation Council to entrench the Army in the economy, the suppression of the PTI through arrests, the loss of its electoral symbol and an outright ban, and a judiciary alternately pliable and obstinate on the question of trying civilians in military courts. The May 9 2023 attacks on military sites gave him his cause; they did not yet give him the room to rewrite the rules.

The 88-hour war changed that. Ten days after the ceasefire, the cabinet made Munir a Field Marshal, explicitly tying the honor to the clash with India and, with it, every subsequent move to consolidate. What followed was systematic. Loyalists replaced the Bajwa-era command. The 27th Amendment created a Chief of Defense Forces, always drawn from the Army, holding command of all three services and the nuclear arsenal, with a five-year term, lifetime immunity, and removal protection stronger than the prime minister's, while abolishing the Joint Chiefs' chairmanship. The Supreme Court was stripped of constitutional jurisdiction and superseded by a new Federal Constitutional Court, prompting two justices to resign. The political class, PML-N and PPP alike, acquiesced; the PTI fragmented, its chief jailed and worn down.

Munir then made the military the face of foreign policy, anchored by his June 2025 lunch with Donald Trump and a string of praise, Pakistan's Nobel nomination of Trump, its role in his Gaza plan, critical-minerals and crypto deals, and mediation of the US–Iran war, even as it waged open conflict with Afghanistan.

What Munir has built is new in Pakistan. It is not a coup with a general in the president's chair. It is a military dictatorship running next to an elected government it has already gutted. That same concentration is the weak spot. The Army has pushed the Air Force, the Navy and the political parties to the margins, but those are exactly the forces that would count if the Army ever split from within.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 2025 April/May crisis between India and Pakistan, Pakistan's internal politics have evolved significantly. The crisis played a catalyzing role in the Pakistan Army's effort to further entrench its role in the country's governance and to securitize the state's political character. This report will make a chronological assessment of key internal developments in Pakistan since its May 7-10 military clashes with India. The Pakistan Army under Asim Munir has sought to maintain three objectives over the last 12 months:

- maximize its own institutional power.
- keep political partners subservient.
- and check the rise of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-led political opposition.

This report assesses how the Pakistan Army has pursued these objectives by tracking changes across three core fronts – military, political, and judicial - from the pre-May 2025 to the post-May 2025 era. The report deliberately does not analyze terrorism within Pakistan or the activities of non-state actors such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)/Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)/Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), or Pakistan's foreign and economic policy overall, or its broader relationship with India.

## FROM COAS BAJWA TO COAS MUNIR (2022-2024)

In his last official address as Pakistan's last Chief of Army Staff (COAS) in November 2022, Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa had asserted that the Pakistan Army had indulged in "constant meddling...in politics for the last 70 years, which is unconstitutional," and that "since February last year (2021), the military has decided they will not interfere in any political matter."<sup>1</sup> The twilight years of Gen Bajwa's six-year term as COAS had featured the latest iteration in Pakistan's cycle of political leaders partnering with the military to secure power and then falling out. Bajwa oversaw the rupture of the relationship between the military establishment and PM Imran Khan, Chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf.<sup>2</sup> Ushered out of power through a judicial-parliamentary process deferential to the establishment, Imran Khan embarked on a street-based anti-establishment movement that contained all the indicators of eventually generating larger demonstrations and threatening the military's grip on Pakistan's hybrid system of governance.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, as Bajwa demitted office, it seemed considerably uncertain how much his successor would align (or diverge) from Bajwa's November 2022 propositions.<sup>4</sup> As Syed Asim Munir took over as Pakistan's 11<sup>th</sup> COAS, this question remained unanswered. Munir's credentials as a former Director General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (DG-ISI) (with his term cut short by Khan), a hafiz of the Quran, and a private individual (clear of prior public attention) had generated speculation but not certainty over Munir's preferred line.<sup>5</sup> Munir himself inherited a Pakistan featuring a resurgence of insurgency by the BLA, attacks by the

TTP (enabled by the return of the Afghan Taliban to Kabul in 2021), and – most importantly – a political leader who could draw on a cadre that was ready to mobilize on the street.

Consequently, between late 2022 and 2025, Munir’s helmsmanship of the Pakistan Army faced significant challenges to the military’s authority and reputation. Internally, in this two-year window, Pakistan faced over 1,800 terror attacks across provinces,<sup>6</sup> primarily by the TTP and Baloch separatist groups. The TTP announced the formal renunciation of its ceasefire with the Pakistan Army in November 2022, the same month that Munir took over as COAS.<sup>7</sup> Externally, while the India-Pakistan February 2021 ceasefire held firm on the Eastern front, Islamabad’s relationship with Kabul under the Afghan Taliban significantly deteriorated over two historic bones of contention – Kabul’s provision of sanctuary to the TTP and its non-acceptance of the Durand Line as a settled international boundary.<sup>8</sup> Hence, this period witnessed over 100 clashes between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban, featuring the use of heavy artillery, Pakistani airstrikes on Kabul, Taliban raids on Pakistani border posts, and intermittent firefights.<sup>9</sup>

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Outgoing Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa hands over the baton of command over to the newly appointed Army Chief General Asim Munir (L), during a ceremony at the army headquarters in Rawalpindi, Pakistan November 29, 2022. Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR)/Handout via REUTERS

However, apart from external and internal security threats (which are the military's constitutional purview), it is the street demonstrations led by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan that proved to be the biggest challenge to the military's domestic popularity. The PTI-led movement climaxed with the demonstrations on May 9, 2023, which featured unprecedented attacks on Pakistan Army institutions, including attacks on the house of the Lahore (IV) Corps Commander.<sup>10</sup> This single day has been eulogized as a Black Day for the Pakistan Army and arguably gave Gen Munir his first concrete *raison d'être* – to do whatever it takes to restore the military's prestige across fronts by punishing those responsible for May 9 and to prevent its recurrence.<sup>11</sup> However, given the intensity of the military's unpopularity and existing structural impediments, Munir arguably realized the need for gradual intensification of the hybrid system – to overpower the civilian component and remove even the limited ambit that it was allowed. In retrospect, it is from this point that a gradual, deliberate, system-wide effort began for the Pakistan military to achieve its three-point objective.

## POLITICAL

Politically, despite a marked PTI-led struggle to prevent it, Imran Khan was arrested and imprisoned by August 2023,<sup>12</sup> convicted in a range of cases, but in the Toshakhana case in particular.<sup>13</sup> While this significantly impeded the PTI Chief from physically participating in street demonstrations, the PTI's ability to pose an electoral challenge was fatally undercut by January 2024 when both Pakistan's Election Commission and the Supreme Court prohibited the party from using its election symbol,<sup>14</sup> forcing its candidates to fight as independents in the February 2024 election. Until then, the formal executive and legislature of Pakistan (first under a PMLN-PPP combine to complete the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly's term till August 2023, and then under a caretaker administration until February, 2024), focused on Pakistan's abject economic crisis. The military had already entrenched itself further into the economy by June 2023 through the creation of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), featuring the Army Chief alongside provincial chief ministers and bureaucrats, as a "single window" to facilitate investors, establish cooperation among all Government departments, and fast-track project development.<sup>15</sup>

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Ultimately, the SIFC became a special-purpose vehicle for the Pakistan Army to protect its own fiscal interests while the civilian administration focused (successfully) on securing continued International Monetary Fund (IMF) support.<sup>16</sup> During this period, it also became evident that Pakistan's two legacy parties – the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) [PML(N)] – were willing to work together (despite occasional infighting) and cooperate fully with the military establishment. Informally termed the 'Munir Doctrine' by a few,<sup>17</sup> the establishment's strong focus on economic repair was personally amplified by the COAS, who touted the SIFC's indispensability to ensure 'ease of doing business',<sup>18</sup> and to operationalize federalism through joint action by all provinces,<sup>19</sup> which would bring a 'trickle-down' effect in each province.<sup>20</sup>

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The February 2024 elections, however, featured a short-lived burst of Pakistan's democratic energies as the need for change and systemic overhaul translated into widespread support for the PTI's independent candidates, relegating ideological misalignment with the PTI itself to the background. This was supplemented by adverse perceptions of particular charges brought against Imran Khan, such as those in the Iddat case (involving Khan's wife, Bushra Bibi), being deemed especially offensive. This resulted in PTI-backed candidates emerging as the single largest political group in Parliament (holding 93 seats).

The leading Pakistani daily, Dawn, criticized the establishment's treatment of the PTI, publishing an editorial titled "Respect the Mandate" and calling on "the powers that be" to "drop their vendetta against the PTI forthwith".<sup>21</sup> However, the establishment's control of the electoral machinery was sufficient to subvert this people's mandate and allow the PML(N), in combination with the PPP and other parties such as the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (Pakistan) [MQM-P] to prove confidence on the floor of the National Assembly, with Shehbaz Sharif continuing as Prime Minister (from before the caretaker administration of Anwar ul Haq Kakar).<sup>22</sup> While the PPP stayed out of the cabinet, it became eminently clear that the PMLN-PPP combine had doubled down on its faith in the hybrid setup and was ready to enable its further entrenchment. This was especially evident on 15 July 2024, when the Sharif-led government banned the PTI as a political party, citing its "anti-state" activities.<sup>23</sup>



Pakistani President Arif Alvi (R) administers the oath of office to newly elected Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif during a ceremony at the Presidential Palace, in Islamabad, Pakistan, in March 4, 2024. /CFP

## JUDICIAL

Judicially, the Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) remained a challenge for COAS Asim Munir. In October 2023, a five-judge bench of the SCP had unanimously declared that the 1952 Pakistan Army Act's provisions, which allowed military courts to try civilians in specific circumstances, were unconstitutional.<sup>24</sup> Led by Justice Ijaz ul Hasan (who later resigned from his post in January 2024), the bench's ruling decisively undercut Munir's efforts to punish May 9 "rioters". Consequently, less than two months later, an Intra-Court Appeals process led to a suspension of the SCP's October decision by a six-member bench led by Justice Sardar Tariq Masood (who had earlier recused himself from hearing PTI's pleas to probe allegations surrounding the conspiracy-tinged "US Cipher").<sup>25</sup> The appeal itself was the first of its kind before an appellate bench formed under the Practice and Procedure Act of 2023, and was allowed by then Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa. The larger bench's juridically suspect suspension of the SCP's October order was merely a continuation of a broader pattern of the Pakistan judiciary – that it oscillated between institutional self-preservation in Pakistan's hybrid setup and professional fealty to universal judicial principles, depending on its threat perceptions.<sup>26</sup> This meant that the judiciary could be forced to comply under significant pressure, but it could not be expected to take the establishment's line unilaterally and consistently.

For instance, on 12 July 2024, an SCP bench under Qazi Faez Isa passed a landmark judgment which allowed PTI independent candidates (using the Sunni Ittehad Council [SIC] as a surrogate) to claim their right to nominate members for reserved (for women) seats in the National Assembly, proportionate to their elected seat share.<sup>27</sup> This decision theoretically allowed the PTI to form a government as it scuttled the two-thirds majority claimed by the PMLN-led bloc. Three days following this judgment, the PMLN-led government banned the PTI and effectively refused to implement the SCP's judgment. By October 2024, the National

Assembly severely curtailed the judiciary's independence through the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment to Pakistan's 1973 Constitution.<sup>28</sup> While the ruling coalition brought in its numbers to bear, the establishment also ensured the amendment's passage through reported strongarming tactics against several Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) of the PTI,<sup>29</sup> the Baloch National Party and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazl), to bring about new provisions vis-à-vis constitutional benches of the SCP, a three-year limit on the Chief Justice of Pakistan's (CJP) term, and increased executive and parliamentary representation in the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (to select judges for the upper judiciary).

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## MILITARY

Militarily, COAS Asim Munir faced a sensitive task. On one hand, Munir inherited the senior leadership, which featured continuity since General Bajwa's tenure as COAS. On the other hand, it also became abundantly clear that the rank and file were not immune to the PTI-led movement or to Imran Khan's popularity and influence. With the additional need to ensure that trusted loyalists and professionals held sensitive posts, Munir began shuffling senior commanders early, starting in December 2022.<sup>30</sup> Munir appointed Lt Gen Mohd Saeed as the Chief of General Staff,<sup>31</sup> given the premature exit of Lt Gen Azhar Abbas (who was earlier competing with Munir for the COAS post),<sup>32</sup> Lt Gen Babar Iftikhar as V Corps Commander Karachi (earlier Director General, Inter-Services Public Relations [DG-ISPR]),<sup>33</sup> and Lt Gen Shahid Imtiaz as X Corps Commander Rawalpindi (seen as a favorite of Munir),<sup>34</sup> and Lt Gen Saqib Mehmood Malik as XXXI Corps Commander Bahawalpur<sup>35</sup> (replacing Lt Gen Faiz Hameed<sup>36</sup> – who fell out publicly with the Munir-led establishment and was seen as a strong Imran Khan ally).<sup>37</sup>

However, it is the May 9 demonstrations and attacks on Pakistani military establishments that triggered a near-unprecedented set of actions under COAS Munir, against the active-duty rank and file as well as retired (but influential) officers. For instance, just a week following May 9, Munir moved Lt. Gen. Syed Aamer Raza as IV Corps Commander Lahore,<sup>38</sup> with Lt. Gen. Salman Fayyaz Ghani removed and subjected to a court-martial for failing to prevent the May 9 attacks.<sup>39</sup> Crucially, Lt Gen Ghani (appointed as IV Corps Commander under Gen Bajwa) had continued in this post despite Munir's considerable reshuffle across other Corps in December 2022. Apart from dismissing other senior officers posted at Lahore Cantonment on May 9,<sup>40</sup> at least 15 officers from across ranks were subjected to strict disciplinary action for "operational lapses".<sup>41</sup>

More consequentially, Munir targeted recently retired veterans for alleged political activities and attempts to influence the rank and file politically. These include Lt Gen Hameed (ret'd; former DG-ISI), who was taken into military custody in August 2024 as one of the "masterminds" of May 9,<sup>42</sup> Major Adil Farooq Raja (ret'd), who faced a Field General Court Martial in absentia in November 2023, and Captain Haider Raza Mehdi (ret'd) – these latter two officers were also stripped of their ranks. A purge of this scale had occurred only under Gen Raheel Sharif as COAS in 2016 against several senior officers for alleged corruption.<sup>43</sup> Across 2024, Munir maintained a dual focus – ratcheting up the military's response to security challenges from the TTP and BLA as well as countering the challenge of "digital terrorism" (at a time when the PTI had resorted to capitalizing on the digital medium to propagate jailed former PM Imran Khan's addresses, including through the use of AI).<sup>44</sup> The former focus was caused by a marked intensification of TTP attacks and a dramatic increase in targeted attacks by the BLA. Consequently, the Pakistan Army conducted one of its highest numbers of kinetic operations in 2024. These included retaliatory airstrikes against Iran in January 2024,<sup>45</sup> targeting Baloch separatist hideouts in Sistan-Balochistan province, as well as retaliatory airstrikes in Afghanistan's Khost and Paktika provinces in March 2024, allegedly targeting TTP commanders after the latter's attack on a Pakistan Army military post in North Waziristan.<sup>46</sup>

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Moreover, in June 2024, the Pakistan Army launched Operation Azm-e-Istehkam,<sup>47</sup> branding it as a re-energized counter-terrorism campaign that sought to avoid the human cost of large operations such as Zarb-e-Azb and focus on smaller, targeted, intelligence-based operations

(IBOs) (even as IBOs themselves did not address the root causes of security issues in tribal areas).<sup>48</sup> It was also in 2024 that Munir’s public addresses revealed a more hardened approach against the gamut of perceived threats to the Pakistani state – internal militant groups, the Afghan Taliban’s sanctuary for such groups (for which he declared that “the whole of Afghanistan can be damned” for Pakistan’s security),<sup>49</sup> as well as the PTI-linked threat that continued to trigger street protests (especially in March, September, and November). Among these, the September 2024 protest led to a virtual shutdown of Islamabad,<sup>50</sup> suspending internet services and disrupting entry and exit points. The subsequent November protests featured a scaled-up iteration of the same event, with thousands arrested by the end of the year and several hundred injured.<sup>51</sup>



Activists of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party of former country’s prime minister Imran Khan, take part in a public rally on the outskirts of Islamabad on September 8, 2024. (ADF/File)

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On May 9, 2024 (observed as a Black Day due to the preceding year's events), Munir declared that the military would treat digital actions as a form of kinetic warfare, since social media was being used to divide the public and the military through disinformation and fake news.<sup>52</sup> He would double down on this by November, when he stated that “unrestricted freedom of speech is leading to the degradation of moral values in all societies”,<sup>53</sup> after the Pakistani state banned social media platforms like Twitter and implemented stronger firewalls.<sup>54</sup> By the end of that year, the key adversaries to Pakistan were largely clear in the Pakistan Army's formulations – the Afghan Taliban, India, the “Fitna al Khwarij” (collective term for militant and terror groups which Pakistan asserts are backed by India and Afghanistan), and “traitors” from the PTI (collectively and pejoratively termed ‘youthia’ by pro-establishment online voices to deem Imran Khan's followers as uninformed and cult-like, and de-legitimize anti-establishment voices).

For the Pakistan military, a chance to combine most of these threats and treat them as one came on 11 March 2025 when BLA militants hijacked the Jaffar Express at Bolan Pass. While the Pakistan Army raided the hijacked train (Operation Green Bolan) and successfully released over 350 hostages (reportedly killing 33 BLA insurgents and losing 18 soldiers in the operation),<sup>55</sup> the incident provided a fillip to COAS Asim Munir to begin redirecting national focus towards threats to the state. On one hand, the Pakistan Foreign Ministry officially blamed both India and the Afghan Taliban for backing and enabling the BLA attack.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, speaking to the Parliamentary Committee on National Security on March 18, COAS Asim Munir promised to defeat both terrorists and their “facilitators”. More importantly, Munir called for the need to turn Pakistan into a “hard state” for the “battle for our survival and that of our future generations”: “How long will we continue to sacrifice countless lives in the style of a soft state?” he had asked.<sup>57</sup>

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By this point, General Syed Asim Munir had spent his 28 months as COAS leveraging unprecedented internal security and political threats to ensure that Pakistan's hybrid governance system both survived and remained guarded. However, it remained clear that the Pakistani populace remained divided in their views of the military, even as the country had pivoted from abject economic crises to more manageable conditions. Throughout late 2022, 2023, and 2024, Munir arguably faced unprecedented conditions (as outlined above) sufficient

to prompt a response characteristic of any Pakistani Army Chief post-Pervez Musharraf. Moreover, while Asim Munir was given an extension until 2027 in November 2024 (along with the Air Force and Navy Chiefs),<sup>58</sup> the COAS' post did not particularly empower him beyond past Army Chiefs (apart from his role in the SIFC).

Despite the ripples from the Jaffar Express attack, it was also not clear as of March 18 (Munir's NSC address) if the COAS could push for a more fundamental restructuring of the state's polity, i.e., changing the character of the polity instead of expanding power within it.

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Gen Asim Munir arguably perceived the opportunity for more radical change after a fresh crisis with India broke out on April 22, 2025, when militants linked to The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba, selectively attacked and killed Hindu tourists, picking out men in particular, in Kashmir's Pahalgam. Along with the killing of a pony-operator, the attack's 26 fatalities represented the worst attack on civilians in India since the 2008 Mumbai attacks, making an eventual Indian military response across the border all but inevitable. Over the fortnight that followed, Indian political leaders made it clear that Indian forces would soon launch attacks, such as when PM Narendra Modi declared on April 29 that the armed forces could act at a time, place, and mode of their choosing. This occurred through India's 'Operation Sindoor' on May 7. Subsequently, India and Pakistan clashed until a ceasefire was declared on the afternoon of May 10.<sup>59</sup> For the Pakistani state, its claim of victory was principally tied to the early hours of May 7, in which Pakistan claimed to have downed a number of Indian fighter jets, including at least one of India's recently inducted Dassault Rafale fighters (using Chinese-supplied PL-15E missiles).<sup>60</sup>

Following the May 10 ceasefire (hours after India struck multiple Pakistani airbases and strategic sites), Pakistan deemed its own retaliatory operation (Bunyan al Marsous) as having been operationally and strategically successful.<sup>61</sup> Across May 10 and 11, PM Shehbaz Sharif publicly heaped praise on Gen Asim Munir for his leadership during the war, crediting him both for the success in war as well as for securing peace (through conversations with the Trump White House), even as Sharif also lavishly credited the US President for brokering the ceasefire.<sup>62</sup>

## HOW MUNIR CLEARED HIS PATH

He removed obstacles within the system, then changed the system itself.

### POWER WITHIN THE SYSTEM

2022 - early 2025

<b>MILITARY</b>	<b>DEC 2022</b> Takes over as COAS; reshuffles corps commanders	<b>2023-24</b> May 9 purge: court-martials, 15+ officers sacked; Faiz Hameed held
<b>POLITICAL</b>	<b>AUG 2023</b> Imran Khan jailed (Toshakhana case)	<b>2024</b> PTI loses election symbol (Jan); party banned (Jul)
<b>JUDICIAL</b>	<b>OCT 2023</b> SC: military trials of civilians ruled unconstitutional	<b>OCT 2024</b> 26th Amendment curtails the judiciary

### APRIL-MAY 2025 CRISIS

*the 88-hour war with India that turned obstacle-removal into system change*

### CHANGING THE SYSTEM

2025 - 2026

<b>MILITARY</b>	<b>MAY 2025</b> Made Field Marshal, five-star for life	<b>NOV 2025</b> 27th Amendment: CDF over all services and nukes; CJCS abolished	<b>DEC 2025</b> Faiz Hameed jailed 14 years
<b>POLITICAL</b>	<b>2025-26</b> PML-N and PPP acquiesce to the new order	<b>OCT 2025</b> PTI fragments; fires its own KP chief minister	<b>SINCE NOV 2024</b> No major PTI street protests
<b>JUDICIAL</b>	<b>MAY 2025</b> Army Act restored, 5-2, by constitutional bench	<b>NOV 2025</b> 27th Amendment guts SC; new Federal Constitutional Court	<b>NOV 2025</b> Two Supreme Court justices resign
<b>FOREIGN POLICY</b>	<b>JUN 2025 ON</b> Trump lunch and praise, Nobel nomination, Gaza plan, US-Iran mediation, minerals and crypto deals.		

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

Before the crisis Munir removed obstacles **within the rules**. After it he **rewrote the rules**, clearing rival officers, the courts and the opposition off the path.

*Compiled from the report; dates as stated in the paper and its sources.*

## FROM COAS GEN MUNIR TO CDF FIELD MARSHAL MUNIR (2025-2026)

The 88-hour conflict in May and the broader crisis since April 22, unarguably expanded the space available for COAS Asim Munir to attempt changes of the system instead of simply within it. Historically, over the 34 years that the military formally ruled Pakistan, changes to the system usually entailed a complete takeover of power by vesting all executive authority in the Army Chief. This functionally meant that the Army Chief would serve either as Chief Martial Law Administrator or as President (usually one was a stepping stone to the other).



Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (R) and President Asif Ali Zardari (C) jointly conferring the Baton of Field Marshal on Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir during a ceremony at the country's President House on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2025.  
Source: Moneycontrol

However, the creation of the hybrid regime itself was the result of key lessons learned by the Pakistan military since Pervez Musharraf's exit, with the principal lesson being that the military could not formally position itself as accountable for governance while also expanding its economic and political power. It is this vulnerability to accountability (necessarily accompanied by challenges from competitors within the military ranks) that ultimately led to the exile of Pakistan's last military dictator in 2008. Even with an escalated stand-off military conflict with India, this lesson could not have been deemed irrelevant. It is within this framing that COAS Asim Munir embarked on new approaches to formal, systemic change that capitalized on the hybrid regime, arguably creating what can be called a military dictatorship alongside, rather than on top of, a democratic state. The latter was the model followed by Field Marshal Ayub Khan, Gen Zia ul Haq, and Gen Pervez Musharraf. The former is now being crafted and perfected by Asim Munir.

Functionally, this would mean that the military would remain in the barracks, and Parliamentary and Executive authority would be formally retained, but the Pakistan Army Chief's power would be expanded to the point that it would virtually eliminate the need for Executive or Parliamentary oversight. Here, the judiciary arguably posed a greater challenge, whose powers

would necessarily need to be curtailed. With greater domestic legitimacy and empowerment, the military could also formally centralize its role in foreign policy decision-making, with the Army Chief's office significantly elevated in protocol. Such centrality would, in turn, also boost the military's legitimacy, especially if the COAS could garner greater prestige for Pakistan on the international stage.

Regardless of the extent to which Munir demonstrated his deliberate desire for systemic change prior to the April/May crisis, it is categorically evident that the Pakistani establishment causally attributed the first step toward such change to the May military conflict with India. This occurred when, just 10 days after the May 10 ceasefire, the Pakistani Cabinet approved elevating General Asim Munir to the rank of Field Marshal, a rank ceremonially conferred for life. In the baton-conferring ceremony, PM Shehbaz Sharif asserted that “this promotion comes in recognition of the strategic brilliance and courageous leadership that ensured our national security and decisively defeated the enemy during a time of existential threat”.<sup>63</sup> Since May 10 was already declared as ‘Youm-e-Marka-e-Haq’ (Day of Remembrance of the Battle of Truth),<sup>64</sup> the Pakistani state officially linking Munir's elevation with a watershed military conflict categorically proved that a causal relationship would now exist between Munir's subsequent efforts at systemic change and the April/May clashes with India, with the latter having a catalyzing effect for Munir's consolidation of power. For what it is worth, the Pakistan PM also declared at the same ceremony that “just as a new independent state was born on August 14, 1947, a new, resilient nation emerged on May 10, 2025.” Field Marshal Asim Munir was evidently being charged with the guardianship of the sovereignty of this new nation.

COAS Asim Munir embarked on new approaches to formal, systemic change that capitalized on the hybrid regime, arguably creating what can be called a military dictatorship alongside, rather than on top of, a democratic state.

The operationalization of this guardianship occurred throughout 2025, through a decisive push to achieve all three variables that the Pakistan Army had focused on prior to the April-May crisis. Functionally, this now meant the consolidation of the military rank and file, the institutionalization of the Pakistan Army's dominance, and the elimination of the judiciary as a challenging force.

## MILITARY

Within the Pakistani senior military leadership, FM Munir's rapid elevation to the rank of Field Marshal decisively redirected national focus away from the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), which was

arguably enjoying the peak of its domestic popularity and visibility in decades. While PAF Chief Zaheer Ahmed Babur was awarded a second extension of service (making him the second-longest serving PAF Chief) in May,<sup>65</sup> the lopsided inter-services equation was cemented with the Army Chief's elevation to five-star rank. Within the Army, FM Munir sustained his focus on shuffling existing and new three-star officers across key commands. By January 2025, Lt Gen Syed Aamer Raza was deemed to have been successful enough in restoring the prestige of Lahore's IV Corps to be moved to General Headquarters (GHQ) and appointed Chief of General Staff, replacing former Director General Military Operations (DGMO) Lt Gen Muhammad Avais Dastgir, who was appointed as V Corps Commander, Karachi.<sup>66</sup> In the same month, Lt Gen Fayyaz Hussain Shah was given his first Corps-level Command at Lahore IV Corps. By May, DG-ISI Lt Gen Asim Malik was given the additional charge as National Security Advisor – a post vacant since Moeed Yusuf demitted office in April 2022.<sup>67</sup>

By August, FM Munir also brought in Lt Gen Aamir Ahsan Nawaz to command X Corps (Rawalpindi) – only the third Baloch regiment officer to head this command after Generals Kayani and Bajwa.<sup>68</sup> Gen Nawaz exchanged places with Lt Gen Shahid Imtiaz, who now serves as the Military Secretary. Showing Munir's continuity of faith in the slate of commands as they existed, Lt Gen Asim Malik was given an extension as DG-ISI by October 2025.<sup>69</sup> With respect to the "battlefield" commands of Peshawar (XI Corps) and Mangla (I Corps), Munir had made a key shuffle in May 2024 – appointing Lt Gen Omar Bokhari to the former and Lt Gen Nauman Zakaria to the latter,<sup>70</sup> both of whom remained in place following the April-May crisis. It is in Balochistan, however, where Munir has left Lt Gen Rahat Naseem Khan's command of XII Corps at Quetta untouched since 2022, showing both Munir's faith in Lt Gen Khan's continued value (despite the Jaffar Express hijacking) as well as the need to ensure continuity of command in Pakistan's most restive province. In any case, Lt Gen Khan remains influential in the Balochistan provincial government's governance decision-making, especially through meetings of the Provincial Apex Committee.<sup>71</sup>

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As of April 2026, a year after the 2025 crisis with India, FM Munir has evidently achieved the objective of removing the older crop of commanders associated with the "Bajwa-Hameed era" (with Lt Gen Khan as a special exception), replacing them with officers proven loyal to FM

Munir. By May 2026, it also became clear that Lt Gen Nauman Zakaria (I Corps) was given the additional charge of Pakistan's new Army Rocket Force Command.<sup>72</sup>

Beyond the internal reshuffling of the Pakistan Army, the 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the 1973 Constitution was the final step in Munir's efforts to bring about change in the system rather than simply expand power within it. Passed by the National Assembly and Senate within two days and signed into law by President Asif Ali Zardari on November 13, the 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment brought forth several unprecedented changes.<sup>73</sup> Specifically relevant to Asim Munir was the creation of the office of the Chief of Defense Forces (CDF), who would hold operational command over all three services, would always be drawn from the Pakistan Army (hence, would concurrently serve as COAS), have command authority over the Strategic Plans Division and Pakistan's nuclear forces, and have a fixed term of five years.<sup>74</sup> Crucially, removing the CDF prematurely would require a two-thirds Parliamentary majority (whereas removing the PM requires only a simple Parliamentary majority according to the Pakistani Constitution). Munir, who assumed office as the first CDF on December 4, 2025, also benefits in particular from the 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment, granting five-star-ranked officers (from all three services) lifetime immunity from prosecution or arrest. Additionally, testimony to Munir's need to dominate, even within the military, is the Amendment's abolition of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, an office in place since 1973 to coordinate and balance inter-service interests. As the sole five-star officer and the first CDF, Munir's office was firmly supreme within the military establishment, while the establishment itself was granted supremacy over the civilian government.

The 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the 1973 Constitution vests new powers in the COAS, operationalizes core aspects of a military dictatorship, and substantially hollows out civilian power along with institutional checks and balances (no matter how weakly they were hitherto enforced). Greater security of tenure than the elected PM, lifelong immunity, operational command of all armed services, effective control of the state's nuclear force and arsenal, and protection from prosecution are only the most prominent pillars of the newly super-empowered COAS role.

Evidently, this cannot be characterized simply as a formalization of the hybrid regime whose earlier ‘informality’ did not impose any real limits on the military establishment’s influence over the civilian component of the hybrid setup, prior to the 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Hence, apart from the symbolic value of formalizing this setup, the Amendment vests new powers in the COAS, operationalizes core aspects of a military dictatorship, and substantially hollows out civilian power along with institutional checks and balances (no matter how weakly they were hitherto enforced). Greater security of tenure than the elected PM, lifelong immunity, operational command of all armed services, effective control of the state’s nuclear force and arsenal, and protection from prosecution are only the most prominent pillars of the newly super-empowered COAS role. It is this increased lopsidedness in the distribution of substantial power between the military and civilian components of the hybrid regime that represents a transformation of the system.

In the new setup, military power is central and civilian power peripheral. Most importantly, the long-term sustenance of this setup (to test its systemic endurance) is immaterial, given that several of these specific constitutional changes were packaged together for customized application to Munir alone. Already, Pakistani military experts and veterans warn that, apart from the obvious institutional imbalance within the services, the Amendment also removes space for any potential recurrence of displays of dissent by service chiefs, as had occurred under Gen Bajwa. For instance, during the 2019 India-Pakistan crisis, Gen Bajwa had reportedly advised Pakistani restraint after Indian airstrikes on Jabba Top, Balakot, but was overruled in the National Security Committee (NSC) by the Air Chief (then Air Chief Marshal [ACM] Mujahid Anwar Khan) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC) (then Gen Zubair Mahmood Hayat).<sup>75</sup> Now, the former office has been made subservient to the COAS, while the latter office has been eliminated.

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## POLITICAL

Within this new political setup, the civilian leadership largely focused on provincial, economic, and environmental issues and played supportive roles in strategic decision-making, which was

evidently led by the CDF. The 2025-2026 period marked a retrenchment by political stakeholders, such as PPP and PMLN, into a new political equation that accepts their stunted national political writ.

Following the April/May crisis with India, the civilian leadership in Pakistan continued its economic focus on sustaining conditions for the IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) granted in September 2024. While the IMF completed its first review of the EFF by May 2025, with Pakistan receiving further tranches to stabilize its economy,<sup>76</sup> the PMLN-led government passed a stringent austerity budget in June 2025 to meet IMF benchmarks, leading to severe nationwide austerity measures and a four-day working week for public employees to reduce energy consumption.<sup>77</sup> While the budget caused friction between the PPP (which is supporting the PMLN government from the outside) and the PMLN over the allotment of development funding to Sindh province,<sup>78</sup> both parties resolved their disputes by July, even as internecine friction continues.<sup>79</sup> While the PMLN (through PM Shehbaz Sharif) has been CDF Munir's principal political partner and supporter, the PPP has been consistent in its support. For instance, rather than oppose the 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment for scuttling Pakistan's democracy, the PPP insisted on lifetime immunity for the President, given the need to protect Zardari from any potential consequences of actions taken at the behest of the Field Marshal.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, parties like the MQM-P focused their protests on the lack of provisions empowering local governments, but withdrew their threat to leave the coalition after the PMLN's assurance that local governance would be addressed through a subsequent 28<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

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While the establishment's political partners continued to acquiesce in the erosion of their own status and share of power, the PTI itself struggled to maintain a coherent front against a newly popular COAS/CDF and suffered from significant infighting. There have been no major PTI-led demonstrations that have captured national attention or brought the national capital to a standstill since November 2024, and the party also canceled its planned Long March to Adiala

Jail (where Khan is imprisoned) following Eid in March 2026.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, splits within the PTI's ranks were most evident in October 2025 when the party fired its own Chief Minister (Ali Amin Gandapur) from the only provincial government where the PTI holds a majority, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).<sup>82</sup> Even as the party's leaders across KP and Punjab swung between reconciliation and fresh infighting,<sup>83</sup> by July 2025 Imran Khan himself was reportedly urging party workers to keep quiet about the infighting and focus on anti-government protests.<sup>84</sup> By March 2026, the method employed by the Munir-led establishment to contain the PTI had become clearer. While Pakistan is replete with historic examples of popular civilian (and military) leaders who fell out with the establishment, their fates have usually swung between exile or death, with occasional prison time reserved for potential threats. Khan himself was first imprisoned under Pervez Musharraf in 2007, when protesting the latter's declaration of a state of emergency. Today, Khan is arguably too popular to be sentenced to capital punishment and too empowered to be politically inactive in exile (he openly charges that Munir is ruling Pakistan through undeclared martial law).<sup>85</sup>

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Policemen escort Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan (middle, with sunglasses) as he arrives at the high court in Islamabad on May 12, 2023. Photo: AFP

While the Pakistan military has indeed forced civilian leaders into exile and borne the risk of their political activity continuing, few leaders have directly confronted the military as directly and substantially as Khan has, making him a sui generis case; Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's assertion over the military post 1971 was enabled only by the latter's sense of humiliation after losing a military contest with India and ceding East Pakistan, with Bhutto's own fate ultimately decided by the military. Consequently, CDF Munir is evidently following a multi-pronged approach. This includes inducing splits among the PTI cadre and leadership through coercion, harassment, incentives, or co-option,<sup>86</sup> keeping the party chief in prison while subjecting him to conditions that ensure gradual physical degradation,<sup>87</sup> consistently delegitimizing protest movements, and creating a chilling effect in both military and civilian spaces to prevent the resurgence of support for Khan.<sup>88</sup> Munir's ability to go to new lengths for the latter was evident by December 11, 2025, when he oversaw the unprecedented sentencing of a former DG-ISI, when Faiz Hameed received 14 years of rigorous imprisonment for inciting sedition and espionage (and as a key conspirator for the May 9, 2023, attacks on military establishments).<sup>89</sup> This marked the first time a former DG-ISI faced a court-martial and conviction, reflecting Munir's confidence and ability to break decades-long conventions within the security services to ensure rank discipline. In any case, the formal institutional apparatus of the state has already ostracized the PTI – its own members of the KP provincial assembly (where it secured a majority for the third consecutive time in the 2024 polls) are officially independents associated with the SIC.<sup>90</sup>

CDF Munir is evidently following a multi-pronged approach. This includes inducing splits among the PTI cadre and leadership through coercion, harassment, incentives, or co-option; keeping the party chief in prison while subjecting him to conditions that ensure gradual physical degradation; consistently delegitimizing protest movements; and creating a chilling effect in both military and civilian spaces to prevent the resurgence of support for Khan.

## JUDICIAL

Of all other formal state institutions, the judiciary remained the greatest potential threat to Munir's efforts at systemic change, even though it had proven pliable. This meant that the establishment's focus on removing judicial threats remained consistent pre- and post the April/May crisis. Among others, the specific question of civilian trials in military courts (the fate

of about 103 individuals arrested for the May 9, 2023 demonstrations) remained open despite the December 2023 Intra-Court Appeals process. Ultimately, the establishment leveraged the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment to convert the SCP bench hearing the case into a seven-judge constitutional bench, which decisively restored the sections of the Army Act that had been struck down in October 2023 on May 7, 2025, with a 5-2 majority. The Pakistani legal fraternity decried the ruling, calling it a “total surrender of civilian rights” and the “death of citizens’ rights to a fair trial”.<sup>91</sup> Crucially, they asserted that the six-month gap between the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment of late 2024 and the 2025 verdict was an attempt by the establishment to prevent the Amendment from being viewed as specifically designed to influence the military courts’ case outcome.<sup>92</sup>

That the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment was indeed designed with this intention was proven by the fact that the Constitution was amended for the 27<sup>th</sup> time a mere 13 months later. While the former amendment expanded the establishment’s ability to control the judiciary, the 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment virtually eliminated the Supreme Court of Pakistan as a constitutional check altogether.

That the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment was indeed designed with this intention was proven by the fact that the Constitution was amended for the 27<sup>th</sup> time a mere 13 months later. While the former amendment expanded the establishment’s ability to control the judiciary, the 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment virtually eliminated the Supreme Court of Pakistan as a constitutional check altogether. The method of using specially constituted constitutional benches alone was arguably deemed insufficient to completely prevent judicial challenges from emerging, especially as the SCP and other upper courts had been (largely) consistent in upholding the illegality of Pakistan’s mass deportation of Afghan refugees (even as it ultimately gave enough space to the government to implement its decision).<sup>93</sup> Overall, the 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment removed the SCP’s power to adjudicate on constitutional matters, restricted its mandate to non-constitutional, civil, and criminal matters, established a new ‘Federal Constitutional Court’ superseding the SCP for all constitutional, inter-provincial, and federal-provincial matters, and expanded the executive/legislative grip on the Judicial Commission to make favorable appointments to the new apex Court. Such a virtual elimination of the SCP has never occurred in Pakistan’s history. That its impact was tectonic was evident in the resignation of two SCP Justices (Mansoor Ali Shah and Athar Minallah) on the day the 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment was signed into law. While Justice Minallah lamented that the constitution was “no more”, Justice Shah asserted that the amendment was “a grave assault on the Constitution of Pakistan”, which “dismantles the Supreme Court...”.<sup>94</sup> In Justice Shah’s

words, “as history bears witness, such a disfigurement of the constitutional order is unsustainable and will, in time, be reversed - but not before leaving deep institutional scars.”

This characterization is similar to that by other Pakistani practitioners and experts for other changes, especially the Army’s formal superiority over the Air Force and Navy which they lament as a “potential disaster”.<sup>95</sup>

## LEVERAGING FOREIGN POLICY

The functional aspects of Field Marshal Asim Munir’s formal centralization in the Pakistani state apparatus were proven early after his elevation to the five-star rank. While the COAS’s outsized domestic role is historic, Munir proved the uniqueness of his position by making the military the face of Pakistan’s foreign policy. Between May 2025 and April 2026, FM Munir participated in at least 15 meetings with foreign civilian and military leaders, both with PM Shehbaz Sharif present and without.<sup>96</sup> Among these, FM Munir’s private lunch meeting with US President Donald Trump on 18 June 2025 was the key springboard that legitimized his international status as de facto head of state, set a precedent in which Munir was accorded protocol near-equivalent to that of a President or PM, and further normalized his supersession of Pakistan’s existing state apparatus.<sup>97</sup> The substance of the meeting remains undisclosed, but Munir evidently used it to convince the US President of Pakistan’s military success over India in May. This was supplemented by Pakistan’s repeated expressions of gratitude to the US President for facilitating the ceasefire and its subsequent nomination of President Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>98</sup>



US President Donald Trump with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir at the White House in Sept 2025. Source: Government of Pakistan

While Trump would go on to credit himself for the India-Pakistan ceasefire at least 80 times up until April 2026,<sup>99</sup> the personal rapport established between Trump and Munir was evident in the US President’s repeated praise of the Field Marshal – “He was really very impressive...An exceptional human being and an inspiring personality” (June 25, 2025),<sup>100</sup> “A great great guy”

(September 25, 2025),<sup>101</sup> “He is a very important guy in Pakistan...I was very honored” (September 29, 2025),<sup>102</sup> “My favourite field marshal” (January 22, 2026 and April 18, 2026),<sup>103</sup> “A tough man, a tough, good fighter” (February 2026) – among many other instances. While President Trump’s expressions on any issue are known to be off the cuff, the consistency in Trump’s perceptions of Munir across meetings (and his documented preference for strong leaders)<sup>104</sup> unarguably buoyed Munir’s position both at home and abroad, making it more difficult for opposition or criticism as Munir’s personal success became inextricably tied to Pakistani national prestige. In any case, Washington’s preference for dealing with military regimes in Pakistan is a historic truism.<sup>105</sup>


While Trump’s conviction regarding Pakistan’s military successes helped Munir’s case, the CDF also ensured a more proactive, risk-laden foreign policy posture designed around Pakistan’s involvement in other conflicts. Of these, the first is Pakistan’s role in implementing Trump’s Comprehensive Peace Plan for Gaza, which includes an International Stabilization Force. Even as overall implementation remains dubious, Arab states remain unwilling to contribute troops (thus far). Pakistan itself publicly denies any commitment having been made (since Pakistan has no formal diplomatic ties with Israel, a core stakeholder in Trump’s plan which scuttles Palestinian self-determination), Pakistan joined Trump’s Board of Peace as a full member – alongside Israel and other Arab states. As the US President himself stated of Pakistan, “They were with us right from the beginning...they back this 100 percent.” (Trump’s September 30 presser with Benjamin Netanyahu).<sup>106</sup>

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Moreover, alongside the rise of Bilal bin Saqib (appointed Chairman of Pakistan’s Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority since December 2025) and his connections with the Trump/Witkoff family and World Liberty Financial,<sup>107</sup> FM Munir oversaw new partnerships built between the US and Pakistan focused on critical minerals and cryptocurrency. By September 2025, the U.S.

Strategic Metals (USSM) company signed a \$500 million mining memorandum with the military-run Frontier Works Organization (FWO),<sup>108</sup> and WLF itself concluded a USD1 Stablecoin agreement with Pakistan to integrate the coin into Pakistan's financial system.<sup>109</sup> Given Trump's personal stake in WLF, his intensifying rapport with FM Munir, Islamabad's lavish arrangements for the Trump family in early 2026, as well as Munir's interest in projecting Pakistan's value to the US – all collectively contributed to a greater Pakistani role in another conflict, the ongoing US-Iran war, which began on 28 February 2026. Here too, Munir has personally become the face of Pakistan's mediatory role in the war since April 7, when the country hosted a significant US-Iran meeting featuring delegations led by the US Vice President and Iran's Speaker and Foreign Minister. Thus far, Munir has pivoted to a more visible role, personally shuttling between Tehran and Islamabad to convey US messages and attempt to advance talks.

Notwithstanding historic friction between Iran and Pakistan, it is Islamabad's ability to leverage Washington's newfound trust in Pakistan that placed it as an agreeable mediator for the Trump White House. For Tehran, which effectively forced Washington to send the Vice President as the lead negotiator (a historic first), agreeing to Pakistan as the site of talks was evidently acceptable. This Pakistani effort to help end the US-Iran war occurred alongside Pakistan's own declaration of "open war" against Afghanistan in February 2026 (Operation Ghazab lil Haq), in which Iran offered to mediate between Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>110</sup> Arguably, while several states have attempted to mediate between the latter two,<sup>111</sup> the persistence of warlike conditions undoubtedly aids Munir's narrative of transforming Pakistan into a "hard state".



Given Trump's personal stake in WLF, his intensifying rapport with FM Munir, Islamabad's lavish arrangements for the Trump family in early 2026, as well as Munir's interest in projecting Pakistan's value to the US – all collectively contributed to a greater Pakistani role in the ongoing US-Iran war.

Ultimately, Munir's internal consolidation of power has been externally catalyzed by the April/May 2025 crisis with India, and subsequently externally reinforced through Pakistan's support for and commitment to Trump's Gaza peace plan, its ongoing mediation between Iran and the US, and the sustenance of active kinetic conflict with Afghanistan.

However, the extreme lopsidedness resulting from Munir's consolidation of power within Pakistan's formal structures of power risks generating new threats to the CDF's office. While the Pakistan Air Force and Navy have traditionally been subservient to the Army, neither service

has faced a situation in which it ceded command to the land-based service. Even as they still cannot be expected to mount a challenge on their own, their support could become crucial if cracks develop within the Pakistan military (as has historically occurred under military rule, spawning waiting-in-the-wings military leaders such as Yahya Khan, Mirza Aslam Beg, and Ashfaq Parvez Kayani). What is evident thus far, however, is that without a military challenger, the political class neither can mount a significant challenge to the Munir-led establishment on its own nor appears willing to do so. Until intra-military pressures develop and political stakeholders such as the PPP and PMLN (the parties that heralded the 2008 deal to end Musharraf's rule) retrench, Munir has evidently cemented his grip on power until at least 2030.

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C-21, 3rd Floor, Qutub Institutional Area, New Delhi, India - 110016.

Phone: 011-43104566 | Email: [office@csdronline.com](mailto:office@csdronline.com) | Web: [www.csdronline.com](http://www.csdronline.com) | Twitter: [@CSDR\\_India](https://twitter.com/CSDR_India)