

DEFENSE

Safeguarding the Future: Pakistan's Defense Policy and Strategy

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On September 6, 1965, Pakistan faced one of its most critical and decisive moments as the nation stood united in defense against aggression during the Indo-Pak war. This was a significant event that not only determined the direction of Pakistan's military but also laid the basis for its modern defense strategies. It is important to reflect on how the lessons learned from that era continue to influence and fortify Pakistan's defense strategy. Today, as the country navigates to deter aggression, counter-terrorism, support economic growth, maintain regional stability, and protect its sovereignty, Pakistan requires a **robust defense policy** that balances both conventional and unconventional factors.

The defense policy of Pakistan has gone through momentous development since it originated in 1947. The partition of India led to pivotal territorial disputes, remarkably Kashmir, which became a fundamental issue in Pakistan's defense strategy from its inception and triggered a series of communal violence. In its early years, Pakistan's defense policy focused on securing resources, building its military force, and developing its infrastructure to protect its sovereignty and defend its borders against India. The defense policy also included seeking alliances to bolster its military capabilities and led to Pakistan joining Western defense pacts like SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) in the 1950s, aligning itself with the US during the Cold War.

The war of 1965 underscored the need for a more robust and self-reliant defense posture as it exposed both strengths and vulnerabilities prompting a shift towards strengthening conventional military forces. Pakistan began to cultivate stronger ties with China to acquire advanced military weapons as the only traditional ally of Pakistan, the US, opted for a policy of neutrality and refrained from intervening or assisting during the war of 1965. Pakistan's defense strategy was mainly focused on its western border with India which left it with an insufficient military presence in East Pakistan. India's intervention and naval blockade were



A **paradigm shift** in Pakistan's defense strategy can be seen after the catastrophic loss in the war of 1971 which resulted in increased focus on nuclear deterrence and self-reliance. Pakistan's productive nuclear tests provided a strategic counterbalance to India's military advantage. It also diversified its alliances by strengthening ties with China and the Middle East, while reducing its reliance on the US. The modern or post 9/11 era has adapted to counter and address challenges like counter-terrorism, internal insurgencies, and a balanced approach to relations with the US and China. Pakistan's defense policy has struggled with dual imperatives of protecting and ensuring its sovereignty in an evolving and unforeseeable global order.

The defense policy of Pakistan is built around four core components reciprocally secure regional stability and national security. Firstly, refurbishment and improvement of the military along with capability amplification are pivotal for supporting a resilient defense against external threats. Secondly, a protective umbrella is provided by nuclear deterrence, maintaining geopolitical equilibrium and preventing aggression. Thirdly, anti-terrorism and national security measures are pivotal for combating radical threats and protecting citizens and state integrity. Lastly, a peaceful environment with reduced conflict risk and increased economic cooperation be bolstered by **strategic partnerships** and dialogue with China, the US, and other neighboring states.

Pakistan's defense strategy is justified mainly by its geopolitical environment and the need to maintain a balance of power in South Asia and is stemmed from the strategic lessons learned from the 1965 war which exposed vulnerabilities in Pakistan's military capabilities. Pakistan's contemporary defense policy emphasizes nuclear deterrence, modernizing military forces to maintain readiness in both conventional and unconventional warfare and counter India's military superiority. The 1965 war also underscored the importance of strategic alliances that provided Pakistan with necessary military, economic, and diplomatic support to bolster its security.

Pakistan's defense future directions will focus on an integrated defense strategy emphasizing interoperability among its military branches and joint operations. **Defense diplomacy** and international cooperation will be critical in fostering development and strategic partnerships. As Pakistan addresses its non-traditional threats and promotes soft power projection, it will gain prominence. Technological innovations will be a key driver with investments in cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence, cyber-defense, and autonomous systems. Strengthening its national security, enhancing its global presence, and contributing to geographic equilibrium and stability are the most essential aims of Pakistan.

Pakistan's defense policy faces a complicated array of challenges and opportunities in the contemporary geopolitical landscape. The escalating **US-China rivalry** presents Pakistan with both opportunities and risks as it seems to balance its relationship with both powers. Besides external vulnerabilities, political instability, economic constraints, and resource management remain crucial in posing challenges as the country goes through political instability, inflation, and energy shortages. Advancements in technology offer prospects and opportunities for revitalization and growth. It also requires important investments in areas like cyber-security, defense capabilities, and artificial intelligence.

Pakistan's defense policy has transformed significantly over some time and has been molded by decades of conflict and strategic challenges, with the 1965 war serving as a crucial turning point that highlights the need for a robust and nuanced defense strategy. Today, the defense policy emphasizes nuclear deterrence, force modernization, and counterterrorism. However, Pakistan still lacks an officially published defense policy and **white paper** and institutionalizing civil-military coordination in defense-making. Pakistan can enhance its defense policy by implementing these measures and promoting better policies as "A strong defense is the backbone of a prosperous nation".

