



# Taiwan's Mass Recall

## Movement Signals a Democratic Recoil Against Beijing's Shadow

As tensions across the Taiwan Strait continue to simmer, a new political front has emerged—not in the realm of missiles or trade, but in the heart of Taiwan's domestic democratic process. In early 2025, a sweeping grassroots campaign to recall dozens of lawmakers surged into the national spotlight. The movement—spurred by public backlash against recent legislative overreach—has become a powerful assertion of Taiwan's democratic resilience, and a subtle yet unmistakable rejection of Beijing's growing influence.

This movement, unofficially dubbed the "Great Recall Wave," targets more than 50 lawmakers, primarily from the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP). Both parties, now in control of the legislature, have pushed through controversial bills that civil society groups say erode democratic safeguards, shift budget priorities away from central oversight, and make it harder to remove elected officials through recalls—ironically, the very tool now being used against them.

### Democratic Self-Defense in Action

At its core, the mass recall movement is a form of democratic self-defense. It is neither orchestrated by the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) nor coordinated by government agencies. Rather, it has been catalyzed by nonpartisan civic groups, pro-democracy activists, and high-profile private citizens—most notably billionaire Robert Tsao, a vocal critic of Chinese

Communist Party influence in Taiwan.

What sparked this wave was a series of legislative reforms passed in late 2024 that many citizens viewed as undermining institutional checks and balances. Changes to recall laws, electoral funding, and judicial procedures were perceived not only as power grabs, but as legal doorways through which foreign influence—particularly from Beijing—could seep further into Taiwan's democratic processes. With some opposition lawmakers

seen publicly engaging with Chinese officials and others accused of prioritizing cross-strait economic integration over sovereignty, the recalls have become a tool of both accountability and resistance.

### Quiet Support, Clear Stakes

While no foreign government has explicitly backed the recall movement itself, Taiwan's broader position has received consistent international support—especially from key



democratic allies. The United States, Japan, and several European nations continue to emphasize the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and have reiterated their backing for Taiwan's self-governance and democratic system.

In Washington, bipartisan support for Taiwan remains strong. Senior U.S. officials have praised Taiwan as a model democracy and a vital partner in the Indo-Pacific. Though the Biden administration has not weighed in on Taiwan's domestic politics, continued arms sales and congressional visits serve as de facto endorsements of the island's democratic trajectory. Japan, increasingly assertive in regional security discussions, has also become more vocal about the strategic importance of a free and democratic Taiwan.

In this context, the mass recall movement is more than a domestic political correction—it is a soft-power statement. It demonstrates to international observers that Taiwan's democratic institutions remain not only

functional but responsive, dynamic, and deeply rooted in public participation.

### A Counter-Narrative to Authoritarianism

For Beijing, the mass recall effort presents a complicating narrative. China has long framed Taiwan's democracy as chaotic, inefficient, and ultimately unsustainable—an argument used to justify its claims over the island. Yet what is unfolding in Taiwan today counters that claim entirely. Far from unraveling, Taiwan's democracy is asserting itself in perhaps the strongest possible way: through peaceful, lawful, citizen-driven processes.

This moment may not define Taiwan's future alone, but it will shape the world's perception of it. The ability of ordinary voters to challenge their representatives, push back against unpopular legislation, and hold officials accountable through institutional mechanisms is a powerful contrast to the authoritarian systems that dominate the region.

### Democracy on Offense

In Taiwan, democracy isn't just surviving under pressure—it's fighting back. The mass recall movement is a high-stakes experiment in grassroots accountability, occurring in the shadow of a rising authoritarian power and under the watchful eyes of global allies.

It is a reminder that Taiwan's most powerful defense may not be military might but its true strength comes from the people—from their voices, their choices, and their courage to say:

"This country is ours. And we're not handing it over."

Author: Shruti Kasahit

# Russia's Strategic Interests in Afghanistan



On March 20 this year, a key meeting at the Taliban's General Intelligence Department (GID) led to the decision to send a three-member delegation to Russia, following orders from Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, the Taliban's supreme leader. The delegates' identities are not disclosed, but they will reportedly meet with the Russian intelligence agency to discuss the Taliban's rehabilitation, including political support and military collaboration. Additionally, Kirill Dmitriev, the head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and a special representative of the Russian President, has reportedly shown interest in strengthening support and collaboration with the Taliban's GID.

This development follows closely on the heels of the visit by Russia's Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu to Kabul in November 2024, during which he met with Taliban Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghani Baradar, assuring the group of its forthcoming removal from Russia's terror list and indicating an interest in broadening bilateral cooperation.

These developments indicate that Russia aims to establish influence in Afghanistan through diplomacy and regional partnerships, while steering clear of direct military involvement.

### Russia's Efforts to Rehabilitate Taliban 2.0

Russia is pursuing a strategy to normalize relations with the Taliban through legal, economic, and diplomatic means, aiming to integrate the group into the global framework while advancing its geopolitical goals.

In April 2025, the Supreme Court of Russia removed the Taliban's designation as a terrorist

organization, a key step in its legal rehabilitation. Since 2021, Russia has maintained its embassy in Kabul and hosted Taliban representatives at events like the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum to bolster their legitimacy.

In light of reports of potential engagements among the intelligence agencies of the two countries, it is noteworthy that Russia frames the Taliban as a partner against ISIS-Khorasan (ISKP), which Moscow blames for attacks like the 2024 Crocus City Hall bombing.

Additionally, Russia is urging the Taliban to address cross-border militancy to ensure stability for allies like Tajikistan in Central Asia. Shared security interests have led to covert operational collaboration, though specifics are not disclosed.

Russia has also called for the lifting of international sanctions on the Taliban, especially those from the UN, to enable access to frozen assets and global financial systems. By inviting Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttagi to the Moscow Format discussions in 2023, Russia subtly promoted recognition of the Taliban's authority, despite its lack of formal international recognition.

While economic ties remain limited, Russia is exploring trade routes through Afghanistan to bypass Western sanctions, focusing on energy initiatives and enhancing access to South Asian markets. Russian investors are considering oil and gas extraction in Afghanistan, where the Taliban has offered "investor-friendly regulations."

Nevertheless, Russia's involvement with the Taliban-led Afghanistan primarily serves as a strategic measure to mitigate the influence of

both the United States and China in the area.

### Russia is Leveraging Afghanistan in its geopolitical balancing maneuver.

Russia is using Afghanistan as a strategic base to boost its influence, challenge U.S. authority, and collaborate with China when interests align, while also countering Beijing's growing presence in the region.

By building ties with the Taliban and involving them in international discussions, Russia is directly challenging Western sanctions and diplomatic isolation of Afghanistan, positioning itself as a counterweight to U.S. influence in Eurasia. This is vital for enhancing its image as a key security provider and regional power.

On the other hand, while Russia does not resist Chinese economic growth, it seeks to prevent China from becoming the dominant force in Central Asia, where Moscow has historically maintained strong ties. This is especially pertinent given China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the region. Although Russia is less involved in large-scale projects in Afghanistan compared to China, it is interested in energy initiatives and economic agreements to limit China's regional dominance. Through military cooperation, diplomatic efforts, and strategic investments, Russia aims to balance China's influence in Central Asia and retain significant control over Afghanistan's political, military, and economic future.

### Russia's balancing act between India & Afghanistan

The normalization of relations between Russia and the Taliban poses both challenges

and limited opportunities for India. Russia's proactive involvement with the Taliban stands in contrast to India's more reserved approach.

Both nations harbor concerns regarding terrorism originating from Afghanistan, leading to enhanced collaboration on counterterrorism efforts. Russia is aiding India by facilitating discreet communications with the Taliban and offering vital insights into the changing security dynamics. However, this engagement carries the risk of empowering the Taliban and potentially other militant factions that threaten Indian interests.

Furthermore, Russia's interactions with both India and Pakistan regarding Afghanistan illustrate its intent to balance regional interests and retain influence over all significant stakeholders. This delicate balancing act compels India to navigate a more complex and competitive diplomatic environment, where its interests may occasionally align with or diverge from those of Russia.

### Conclusion

Russia's relationship with the newly established Taliban government in Afghanistan is currently in a state of development, focused on enhancing regional influence, combating terrorism, and addressing the power void created by the West's exit. For India, the Russo-Afghan links present a complex dynamic. Russia's deeper ties with the Taliban offer India opportunities for counterterrorism cooperation and regional dialogue, but also challenge India's traditional strategy of keeping a distance and supporting a representative Afghan government, requiring a careful approach amid the shifting geopolitical landscape in South Asia.

Author: Columist

# Jordan's ban on the Muslim Brotherhood

Jordan takes a bold step of banning the Muslim Brotherhood on April 23, 2025, and this includes shutting down its offices, confiscating properties, and criminalizing its operations, 16 suspected members of the group were arrested for allegedly planning rocket, drone, and explosive attacks. The group denies it, but the government characterizes the group as working undercover and poses an existential threat to national stability.

A ban on the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, as the party continues to be the country's largest opposition political party. Its announcement was later followed by the seizure of its headquarters and files confiscated by the authorities, as the party secretary-general confirmed the party continued to work under legal guidelines.

The Jordanian government's relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood has soured after decades. While the Brotherhood has been in Jordan since the 1940s, it is now seen as a threat to national stability.

Nearly a century ago, the Muslim Brotherhood was established in Egypt for the purpose of implementing Islamic law abroad. It faces bans in several countries for perceived threats to the state.

Egypt banned the Brotherhood in 2013, and the UAE labelled it a terrorist group. Jordan is now choosing stability over ideology.

### What is the Muslim Brotherhood?

The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928, advocates for Islamic governance, emphasizing Sharia law as the foundation of statehood has faced controversy, especially in Jordan during the 1950s.

The Muslim Brotherhood claims to be a legitimate political movement but is a destabilizing force, supporting Hamas and promoting anti-Western sentiment across the Arab world.

### Strategic benefit to Israel & US

For Israel, this marks a strategic shift with potential security risks. A Brotherhood-empowered Jordan could spark internal instability and increase anti-Israel sentiments along its border, while a weakened Brotherhood might diminish support for Hamas. Although Jordan claims the Islamic Action Front is independent from the Brotherhood, their goals and messaging overlap. Israel generally benefits when Islamist factions lose power, particularly those undermining democratic norms.

Israel should enhance cooperation with Jordan through intelligence-sharing and joint efforts. Jordan's ban on the Muslim Brotherhood benefits its stability and promotes regional security.

Jordan's prohibition of the Muslim Brotherhood represents a significant political statement amidst increasing pressures on the kingdom. This action signals to Iran, Hamas, and potentially the United States that Jordan will not tolerate efforts at destabilization or populist movements linked to terrorism.

The Brotherhood's future hinges on its choice to resist or reorganize. Jordan's ban highlights that political Islam cannot undermine state integrity while posing as a democratic opposition.

Author: Columist



# India's Strategic Shift Squeezing the lifeline of Pakistan

In a move that has sent shockwaves across the subcontinent and the international community, India has officially suspended the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) with Pakistan. This historic decision came in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22, 2025. The decision was announced by India's Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), marking a profound shift in India's approach to dealing with cross-border terrorism, not through war or retaliation alone, but through strategic leverage. India's message was clear: if Pakistan continues to use terror as statecraft, India will respond not only militarily or diplomatically, but also by squeezing the lifeline of Pakistan, its water supply.

## Indus Water Treaty: What is it, History

The Indus Waters Treaty, signed in 1960 under the mediation of the World Bank, has long been hailed as a rare success in India-Pakistan relations. Despite three wars, multiple skirmishes, and countless terrorist attacks, the treaty endured as a symbol of cooperation. It allocated the three eastern rivers "Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej" to India, while the three western rivers "Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab" were granted to Pakistan. India was permitted limited use of the western rivers for non-consumptive purposes like hydroelectricity, but largely, the flow was allowed to Pakistan without major obstruction. This generous gesture, despite India being the upper riparian state, was upheld for decades. But now, that patience has run out.

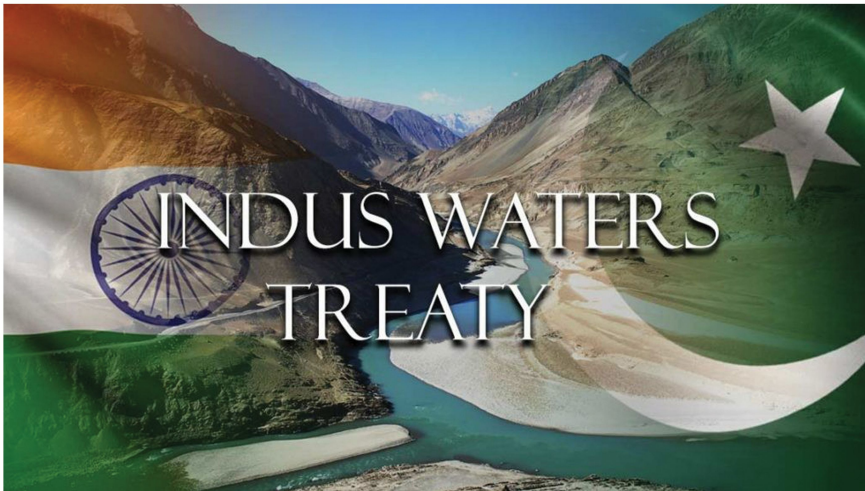
## Water as a Weapon- 'India's Strategic Shift'

By suspending the treaty, India has moved to use water as a strategic weapon, a non-violent yet profoundly disruptive tool. For Pakistan, a country already on the brink of water scarcity, this development could have catastrophic consequences. According to the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources, the country could run out of usable water as early as 2025, making it one of the most water-stressed nations in the world. The Indus river system forms the backbone of Pakistan's economy, feeding over 80% of its irrigated agriculture and powering major hydroelectric projects that supply more than 30% of the country's electricity.

## Pakistan's Deep Dependence on River Systems and the Looming Economic Fallout

This suspension threatens to unravel Pakistan's already fragile agricultural sector. With nearly 55% of the population employed in farming, and agriculture contributing about 19% to the GDP, the disruption of water from rivers like the Jhelum and Chenab could decimate crop yields. Essential crops like wheat, cotton, and rice all heavily dependent on consistent irrigation are likely to suffer.

Furthermore, mega irrigation projects like the Cholistan Canal Project, which aimed to



convert over 1.2 million acres of arid land into farmland, now stand in jeopardy. Even the celebrated Punjab agricultural belt, the pride of Pakistan's food production, risks turning into a dust bowl if the river flows are reduced or interrupted.

The impact does not stop at the fields. Cities such as Lahore, Multan, Sukkur, and Karachi depend heavily on water from the Indus basin for drinking and sanitation. If India exercises its rights to restrict or divert these waters, Pakistan's urban population will face a full-blown water crisis. Shortages could trigger unrest in urban areas, public protests, and even civil disorder. The country's already overburdened infrastructure would struggle to meet the basic needs of millions, especially in poorer communities. With worsening health outcomes, sanitation failures, and a rise in water-borne diseases, the crisis could spiral into a humanitarian emergency.

The consequences also extend to Pakistan's energy sector. Major dams like Tarbela and Mangla, both fed by the Indus, generate a significant portion of Pakistan's electricity through hydropower. As water levels drop, electricity generation will decline, leading to widespread power outages. For a nation already grappling with blackouts and energy inflation, this would further cripple industries,

disrupt services, and stifle economic growth. Some estimates predict a GDP decline of 2-4% annually if the treaty remains suspended.

## India's Strategic Realignment on the Indus Waters Treaty

India has long faced problems under the Indus Waters Treaty. While being the upper riparian state, it has remained bound by outdated provisions that often work against its national interest. Time and again, India's attempts to develop legitimate infrastructure projects on the western rivers have met with resistance. Two notable examples are the Kishanganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects, which India constructed within its rights under the treaty. Yet, Pakistan has consistently opposed these projects, taking the matter to international arbitration and delaying India's progress.

Internationally, Pakistan is likely to seek legal redress, potentially appealing to the International Court of Justice or urging the World Bank, which is a guarantor of the treaty, to intervene. However, India has argued that its move is justified. In January 2023, India had issued a formal notice to Pakistan demanding the renegotiation of the treaty's outdated provisions and dispute resolution mechanisms. Pakistan failed to respond adequately, and

continued provocations in the form of cross-border terrorism further hardened India's stance. Legal experts note that the treaty was never intended to be eternal in the face of persistent hostilities. India's position is increasingly seen as one of strategic restraint replaced by strategic assertion.

## Conclusion

India's decision to stop following the Indus Waters Treaty shows a big change in how it deals with other countries in the region. For many years, India tried to be generous and avoided using its stronger position in terms of land and economy. But Pakistan kept taking advantage of this kindness, especially when it came to security issues. Now, India is changing its approach. It is using all the tools it has, economic strength, military power, and now control over river water. This could become an example of how countries can use resources as a weapon in conflicts without actually going to war.

The bigger picture is this. Pakistan is rapidly running out of options. With a collapsing economy, rising food inflation, and growing political instability, this latest blow comes at a time when it can least afford it. The world is watching to see whether Islamabad will continue to fund and harbor terror elements or if it will finally recalibrate its policies. Because in this new era of geopolitics, water is not just a resource. It's a power. And India has just reminded the world who controls the tap.



Photo courtesy India Today Group

Author: Columnist

# The Afghan Safe Haven Strategy ISI's Role in Relocating Lashkar-e-Taiba with Taliban Assistance



In Pakistan, terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) have formed deep operational and ideological ties with Afghanistan, largely supported by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and its long-standing partnership with the Haqqani Network. This alliance has enabled the cross-border proliferation of jihadist groups, creating a complex web of militancy that extends from Pakistan into Afghanistan and beyond.

## ISI, Haqqani Network, and the Cross-Border Jihadist Nexus

The Haqqani Network, an Islamist militant group in Afghanistan, is seen as a "veritable arm of the Pakistani ISI".

Since the 1970s, it has received significant

support and shelter in North Waziristan, playing a key role in Pakistan's strategy to influence Afghanistan. The ISI's connection with the Haqqani Network has been crucial for the movement, training, and planning of Pakistani terrorist groups in Afghanistan.

## Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad: Afghan Connections

LeT and JeM have deep ties with Afghan terrorist groups due to shared history, ideology, and operational interests. Founded in 1987 by Hafiz Saeed with help from al-Qaeda's Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam, LeT emerged from the anti-Soviet jihad, establishing training camps in Afghanistan with bin Laden's support.

Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, LeT's operational commander, even shares familial ties with

Al-Qaeda and has led attacks across various regions, highlighting the group's integration into global jihadist networks.

With the Taliban's rise in the 1990s, LeT and JeM were permitted to operate training camps in Taliban-controlled Afghan territory, particularly in Kunar and Nangarhar. LeT's Salafi (Ahl-e-Hadith) ideology distinguished it from the primarily Deobandi Afghan Taliban and JeM. However, shared goals of Islamic governance and resisting Western influence led to initial collaborations. These training camps became hubs for planning attacks on India, especially in Kashmir, and for providing sanctuary and resources to Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters.

After the US-led intervention in 2001, LeT and JeM provided logistical support and safe havens for Taliban and Haqqani leaders fleeing Afghanistan, further intertwining their operational destinies. LeT's operational commander, Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, has coordinated attacks across multiple conflict zones, leveraging Afghan territory and Taliban support.

While LeT and JeM's primary alliances have been with al-Qaeda and the Taliban, there are indications of limited operational overlaps with ISIS.

LeT's network has supported al-Qaeda by providing recruits, training, and safe houses, as evidenced by the capture of senior al-Qaeda operatives in LeT facilities. JeM, meanwhile, has maintained alliances with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba, creating a dense web of operational partnerships focused on Afghanistan and Kashmir.

## ISI's Strategic Facilitation

Historically, Pakistan's ISI has leveraged its

influence over the Haqqani Network to facilitate the activities of LeT and other terror outfits in Afghanistan. This collaboration has allowed these groups to set up training camps and safe havens in eastern Afghanistan, particularly in areas controlled by the Haqqani Network and the Taliban. The Haqqani Network often acts as a conduit for ISI directives, helping coordinate attacks on Indian interests in both Afghanistan and India. Furthermore, the shared resources, intelligence, and operational expertise have strengthened a resilient terrorist infrastructure along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Reports also indicate that the ISI has pushed the Haqqani Network to strengthen ties with al-Qaeda affiliates and ISIS-Khorasan (ISKIP), allowing attacks to be linked to ISKP, which aids both the Haqqani Network and LeT. Arrests of ISKP leaders connected to LeT in Afghanistan underscore the ISI's role in establishing a flexible terror network that spans borders.

## Recent Developments post-Taliban Resurgence

Following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, LeT and ISI (Pakistan)-supported terror outfits have reportedly expanded their presence in Afghanistan, setting up new training camps in provinces like Nangarhar, Kunar, Helmand, and Zabul.

These camps focus on advanced combat and explosives training, with the tacit approval of the Taliban regime. The ISI's continued ties with the Haqqanis have ensured that Pakistani terror outfits operate with relative impunity, using Afghan soil as a launchpad for attacks on India and elsewhere.

## Rebranding and Perpetuation of Terror

To evade scrutiny, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and

Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) have rebranded their affiliates in Kashmir, such as The Resistance Front (TRF) and the People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF).

LeT has been linked to major terrorist incidents in South Asia, including the 2000 Amarnath Yatra attack, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and the 2017 Kashmir attack, highlighting their ongoing threat to regional stability. The recent May 2025 Pahalgam attack, which killed 26 tourists, was attributed to TRF, an offshoot of LeT. Historical links, marked by operational synergy with Afghanistan, have emboldened and facilitated LeT's carrying out of such heinous acts of terrorism against India.

It is noteworthy that, meanwhile, due to rising tensions in light of the terror incident in Pahalgam, many senior Pakistani military officials have reportedly moved their families abroad, to locations in the UK and the US, reflecting concerns about Pakistan's internal instability.

The collaboration between Pakistan's ISI and the Haqqani Network, alongside groups like LeT, has created a militant axis between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This alliance allows Pakistani terrorist groups to strengthen their presence in Afghanistan, posing a significant threat to regional stability, especially for India. There is an increasing movement of LeT operatives into Afghan provinces such as Kunar, Nangarhar, and Zabul. This infiltration, facilitated by porous borders, enables LeT to target Indian interests and connect with local jihadist networks. Talha Saeed, Hafiz Saeed's son, is reportedly managing LeT's operations in Afghanistan, with support from Pakistani madrassas for recruitment.

Author: Columnist



## Navigating New Waters Putin's Military Strategy in the Indo-Pacific



The Russian military expansion effort recently has captured the attention of many observers as a sign that the country seeks greater influence beyond Europe. It is Moscow's desire to enhance cooperation with Bangladesh and Indonesia. In a friendly move, three Russian warships docked for four days at the Chittagong port. As a matter of fact, this visit is part of Russia's long-term arms sales and investment program in Bangladesh, which includes a nuclear power plant at Rupur. Also, Russia intends to construct an airbase on Indonesia's Byak island in order to enhance its strategic position in the Indo-Pacific region. The Indonesian government denies this, but Australia is concerned that Russian influence will increase in the region surrounding it. Putin's expansion aims to increase Russian influence despite limited resources.

### Global Presence

Moscow wants to regain its status as a major global power, as indicated by its entry into Bangladesh and Indonesia. Russia wants to show that it has a naval and aviation presence outside of Europe, which is why it is sending warships to Bangladesh and negotiating for an airbase in Indonesia. The plan is a component of its larger strategy to reduce its reliance on Europe and form new alliances.

During the Cold War, Russia significantly supported Bangladesh's independence. Bangladesh's reliance on Russia for weapons and infrastructure, like the Rupur nuclear plant,

strengthens Russia's presence in the Indian Ocean.

### Access to Strategic Waterways

One of the busiest shipping lanes in the world and a vital chokepoint for international trade is the Malacca Strait. A Russian presence in the region would challenge American dominance in the Indo-Pacific by monitoring maritime traffic and influencing regional dynamics.

Indonesia's recent entry into BRICS, facilitated by Russia, demonstrates Moscow's ability to use diplomacy to enhance its geopolitical standing. By strengthening ties with countries like Indonesia, Russia can counteract Western sanctions and isolate itself from the international community.

### How concerned should Australia be?

Australia is concerned about Russia's presence in Indonesia because it wants to protect the area. Russian long-range aircraft, like the vintage Tu-95, are used for bombing and espionage. They fly over 10,000 kilometres with no trouble.

This will allow the Russian air force to monitor US military activities in Guam, collect intelligence on military bases in the Northern Territory (also occupied by US Marines), and conduct ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) operations during Australian military exercises from an Indonesian platform. Additionally, because Beijing and Moscow are allies, any information gathered about Russia

may be shared with China.

The reported Russian military interest in Indonesia will also have irritated Australian foreign policy makers, especially since Canberra has invested significant diplomatic capital in boosting Australia-Indonesia ties.

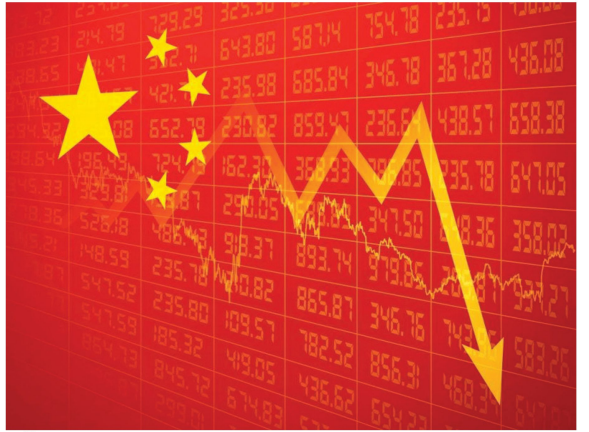
Russia faces significant challenges in sustaining its military expansion. The conflict in Ukraine has strained resources, leading to questions about whether the shift toward the Indo-Pacific is sustainable or merely symbolic. Some analysts suggest Moscow may be overextending itself, while others view it as a long-term strategy to regain influence.

China's militarization of the South China Sea highlights risks for Russia. While Beijing has established dominance, it faces criticism from neighbouring countries and the West. As Russia seeks to expand in Southeast Asia, it must balance cooperation with local nations against potential backlash from rivals.

Moscow is looking for new ways to boost its presence in the Indo-Pacific region. Its military moves in Bangladesh and Indonesia are a daring attempt to reestablish itself as a global superpower. But how well this plan works out will depend on whether Moscow can juggle its ambitions with its limited resources and deal with the tricky regional situation. As everyone keeps an eye on this, it could shake up the geopolitical scene in the Indo-Pacific, challenging the current power balance and paving the way for future conflicts.

Author: Shruti Kaushik

## China Economic Pressure



China's Political Bureau of the Communist Party convened an emergency meeting on April 25, where General Secretary Xi Jinping presided over discussions on the struggling economy amid escalating global tensions.

Despite official claims of "positive trends," the leadership acknowledged the fragile state of China's economic recovery, which continues to face significant headwinds. The meeting revealed growing concerns about the "intensifying impact of external shocks" that threaten to derail growth targets.

"It is essential to prepare for worst-case scenarios," the statement emphasized, revealing anxieties about the sustainability of current economic policies as confidence wavers among investors and consumers alike.

The leadership's desperate push for a "more proactive fiscal policy" alongside a "moderately loose monetary policy" signals a recognition that previous measures have failed to generate sufficient momentum. Plans to accelerate bond issuance and cut reserve requirements appear to be last-ditch efforts to stimulate a sluggish economy burdened by structural weaknesses.

Officials conceded the need to "increase the earnings of low- and middle-income groups," tacitly acknowledging persistent income inequality that has hampered domestic consumption. The meeting's focus on removing

"restrictive measures in the consumption sector" highlights regulatory obstacles that have long impeded economic vitality.

The troubled real estate sector, once a pillar of China's growth, continues to require intensive policy support, with authorities still seeking to "consolidate the stable momentum" of a market that has seen dramatic price corrections and developer defaults.

In a telling sign of internal challenges, the leadership stressed the importance of ensuring that "basic living needs are met, salaries are paid, and governments function smoothly at the primary level" – fundamental concerns that reveal grassroots economic strain.

The meeting's emphasis on "preventing and defusing risks in key areas" underscores the precarious balance China must maintain as it grapples with local government debt crises and financial vulnerabilities that threaten systemic stability.

Despite rhetoric about innovation and "new quality productive forces," the leadership's focus on "unconventional counter-cyclical adjustments" suggests growing desperation to maintain control over an increasingly unpredictable economic trajectory as global partnerships cool and domestic challenges multiply.

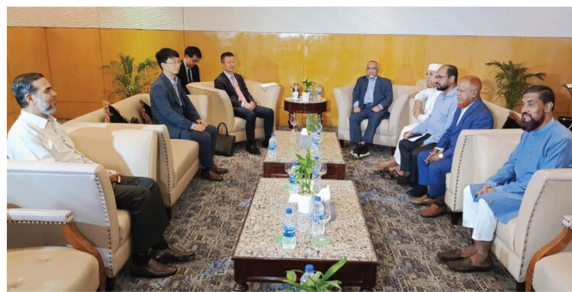
Author: Shruti Kaushik

## China's Rohingya Move Could Backfire Entertaining Islamic Separatism At Myanmar's Expense

In a development that threatens to upend Southeast Asia's fragile stability, Bangladesh's Jamaat-e-Islami party has floated the idea of creating an independent Rohingya state out of Myanmar's sovereign territory. More alarming than the proposal itself is the forum where it was aired as a meeting with Chinese Communist Party officials in Dhaka on April 27, 2025. Far from following recognized diplomatic channels, this backdoor discussion highlights Beijing's willingness to entertain dangerous ambitions under the guise of quiet diplomacy.

The Chinese delegation, led by Peng Xiubin of the CPC's International Department, held talks with Jamaat-e-Islami leaders including Nayeib-e-Ameer, Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher. Officially, China continues to affirm its support for Myanmar's territorial integrity. Yet, its openness to hearing such separatist demands signals a far more opportunistic agenda. The situation is compounded by the interim Bangladeshi government's tacit support for the Arakan Army's increasing control of Myanmar's Rakhine region, creating a power vacuum that external forces could readily exploit.

Behind the humanitarian facade lies a stark demographic reality. Since the Rohingya exodus in 2017, Bangladesh's refugee camps have seen a steady surge in population, growing at an annual rate close to 3%. Despite lacking basic amenities like land, permanent housing, or stable livelihoods, the Rohingya population is expanding rapidly, now inching towards 3.5 million. Against this backdrop, demands for sovereign land appear not as desperate cries for survival, but as increasingly audacious political claims, driven by demographic momentum and strategic manipulation. Masquerading as refugees and seekers of shelter, they have embedded themselves like parasites within the nation's fabric. Steadily draining its resources, eroding its sovereignty, and quietly nurturing ambitions of separatism under the guise of victimhood.



For India, there is reason to be vigilant but not fearful. The proposed Rohingya state would directly threaten India's Kalandan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, a critical link connecting the Northeast to the Bay of Bengal. Severing this corridor would isolate India's northeastern states, forcing greater reliance on the vulnerable Sittoung Corridor which is an outcome that suits Beijing's strategic interests.

However, India's robust military posture and expanding regional partnerships provide the necessary tools to neutralize such moves. What is required is heightened intelligence monitoring and steady infrastructural resilience, not reactive alarmism.

The real irony is that China itself could ultimately suffer the gravest consequences of this gambit. By emboldening Islamist separatism in its backyard, Beijing risks importing instability into its own southwestern provinces. Yunnan, with its porous borders and historic trade routes, could easily become an entry point for radicalized networks making

their way back from the Middle East. Meanwhile, unrest in Xinjiang, long suppressed but never truly extinguished, could find new energy from these external shocks. In seeking to destabilize its rivals, China may be nurturing the very separatism it has spent decades trying to crush.

When every demand – be it for food, clothes, aid, land, privilege, or power it comes dressed as helplessness but leads to domination and terrorism. What Myanmar does today could send shockwaves throughout the region and for China, the consequences are real. The rise of separatist movements on its doorstep is a reminder that instability doesn't stay contained; it spreads. What's happening in Myanmar could become more than just a local conflict it could ignite a fire at China's own border, one that Beijing can't afford to ignore. It's not just a distant threat it's something that could touch China in ways it never expected.

Author: Shruti Kaushik

## China's Grip on South China Sea

Faces New Strains as Regional Navies Quietly Align



In a subtle yet significant shift in the South China Sea's power dynamics, the Philippines and Taiwan are reportedly engaging in "unofficial and informal" naval coordination, a move that quietly chips away at Beijing's maritime assertiveness.

Rear Admiral Roy Vincent Trinidad, spokesperson for the Philippine task force on the South China Sea, revealed that naval interactions with Taiwan are ongoing and that both sides are even considering joint patrols in the Luzon Strait which is a vital waterway that connects the South China Sea to the Pacific and borders both nations.

Though Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense stopped short of confirming such cooperation, it acknowledged a "pragmatic attitude" toward working with regional partners to uphold peace and stability. The careful wording reflects Taipei's traditional caution, yet the strategic intent is evident: a regional tightening of informal alliances that

increasingly bypass Beijing's dominance. This growing collaboration is unspoken in official treaties yet but marks a symbolic erosion of China's influence in a region it has long sought to dominate through aggressive military posturing and gray-zone tactics. The Luzon Strait, in particular, is a sensitive chokepoint for both commercial shipping and military maneuvers. Increased naval cooperation there signals a willingness among China's neighbors to counterbalance its presence without directly provoking conflict.

Beijing, already grappling with diplomatic resistance from Vietnam and Indonesia, now faces the prospect of a slowly forming regional security web aimed at constraining its maritime reach. While still in its early stages, the Philippines-Taiwan engagement reflects a broader trend: China is no longer unchallenged in the South China Sea – and its sphere of influence may be quietly shrinking.

Author: Shruti Kaushik



# Flag Wars in the South China Sea

## Sandy Cay Became a Flashpoint Amid Balikatan Exercises

### Sandy Cay in South China Sea

Sandy Cay is a contested region within the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, located near the Philippines.



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Tensions between the Philippines and China have surged again in the South China Sea this April, this time over Sandy Cay, a group of small sandbars near Thitu Island, a Philippine-held territory in the Spratly Islands.

April 2025 mid month, Chinese Coast Guard personnel were seen planting their flag on Sandy Cay, asserting their claim over the uninhabited but strategically crucial feature. In response, the Philippines dispatched a joint contingent of its Navy, Coast Guard, and maritime police to the area, raising the Philippine flag to counter Beijing's move.

Sandy Cay may appear insignificant at first glance, but in the complex web of South China Sea geopolitics, even the smallest landforms carry immense weight. Under international maritime law, physical occupation or control of these features can extend a country's territorial sea claim by 12 nautical miles, directly impacting fishing rights, undersea resources, and strategic naval positioning.

The timing of this escalation is no coincidence. The confrontation unfolded just as the Philippines and the United States launched their annual Balikatan military exercises the largest to date.

This year's drills featured new elements, including integrated air and missile defense operations and live-fire exercises simulating the defense of remote islands.

For Beijing, Balikatan represents a growing threat: a symbol of deepening Philippine-American military ties and Manila's firmer stand against Chinese encroachments. Chinese officials have accused the Philippines of "colluding with external powers" to "provoke instability," signaling Beijing's unease at a more assertive regional resistance.

From the Philippine perspective, Sandy Cay is not just about symbols. It represents a line that must be defended to uphold the 2016 arbitral ruling that invalidated China's sweeping claims in the South China Sea — a decision Beijing continues to ignore. The act of raising the Philippine flag is a deliberate assertion of sovereignty at a time when Manila refuses to back down.

The standoff at Sandy Cay, set against the backdrop of intensified military cooperation with the U.S., highlights the shifting dynamics in Southeast Asia. The Philippines, once seen as reluctant to confront China directly, is increasingly willing to assert its rights — with the backing of stronger allies.

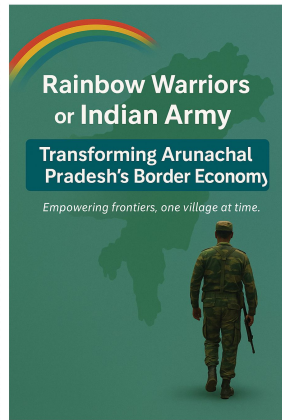
While no shots have been fired, the situation remains volatile. Each flag raised, each maneuver made in these contested waters carries risks of miscalculation. Yet for Manila, standing firm at Sandy Cay is not merely about a patch of sand; it is about defending national dignity, international law, and regional security at a time when the balance of power in Asia is under sharp contest.



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# Rainbow Warriors or Indian Army

## Transforming Arunachal Pradesh's Border Economy



The Indian Army has emerged as a powerful catalyst for positive transformation across Arunachal Pradesh, generating substantial employment opportunities while strengthening infrastructure along the strategically important Indo-China border. Through innovative initiatives combining development with security, the military is empowering local communities in this frontier state.

The army's "Vibrant Villages Program" has invested approximately ₹450 crore in infrastructure development across 662 border villages, creating over 1,200 jobs for local youth in 2024 alone. This comprehensive approach has revitalized remote communities while establishing sustainable livelihood opportunities in previously underserved regions.

Infrastructure development has been particularly impactful, with the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) employing over 3,000 local residents in the construction of critical transportation networks. The strategic 2,000 km trans-Arunachal highway and nearly 1,500 km

of border roads have connected isolated communities to economic opportunities while enhancing mobility in challenging terrain.

A standout initiative is the "Rainbow Trout Project" launched in March 2024 as part of the army's River Ranching program. This innovative ecological and economic venture involved releasing approximately 50,000 rainbow trout fingerlings into selected tributaries of the Siang and Lohit rivers near the Indo-China border. The project has already engaged 120 local families in prosperous fish farming activities, generating an estimated annual revenue potential of ₹2.4 crore while establishing sustainable economic activities in sensitive border regions.

The army has established five vocational training centers across Arunachal Pradesh specializing in traditional crafts, sustainable agriculture, and eco-tourism. These centers have successfully trained over 500 local residents since late 2023, fostering entrepreneurship and diversifying income sources beyond traditional subsistence agriculture.

Skill development initiatives have been tailored to the unique needs of Arunachal Pradesh, with programs designed to capitalize on the region's natural advantages. The army's training program launched in February 2024 has equipped 350 young people with specialized skills in high-demand fields including hospitality, renewable energy installation, and information technology.

Healthcare access has improved significantly through the army's medical outreach programs, which simultaneously create employment for local healthcare workers. Mobile medical units have conducted over 200 camps in the past year, providing essential services to approximately 35,000 residents in remote settlements while training local paramedical staff.

Through these multifaceted initiatives, the Indian Army continues to demonstrate exceptional leadership in balancing security imperatives with community development in Arunachal Pradesh. By generating sustainable employment opportunities while strengthening India's strategic presence, the army has created a model of integrated development that enhances both border security and community prosperity in this geopolitically significant Himalayan state.

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# South Korea's Military Advancements Reshape Regional Defense Landscape



South Korea has dramatically accelerated its military modernization and defense industrial expansion, establishing itself as a formidable player in the global defense market while enhancing its strategic posture in Asia.

The nation recently unveiled an ambitious 4.9% increase in its 2025 defense budget, reaching approximately \$71.3 trillion won (\$41.9 billion). This enhanced funding prioritizes countering North Korean threats while developing autonomous capabilities, with over 30% dedicated specifically to defense acquisition and R&D initiatives.

South Korea's defense exports have surged to unprecedented levels, reaching \$17.3 billion in 2023—a remarkable 140% increase from the previous year. Major recent contracts include a \$15.7 billion deal with Poland for K9 Thunder self-propelled howitzers and a \$920 million agreement to supply 18 FA-50 light combat aircraft to Malaysia.

The Republic of Korea Navy has commenced sea trials for its first KDX-IV class destroyer, an 8,200-ton vessel equipped with enhanced

ballistic missile defense capabilities and advanced indigenous combat management systems. Additionally, construction has begun on the country's first 40,000-ton light aircraft carrier, the LPX-II, scheduled for completion by 2053.

In the aerospace sector, the KF-21 Boramae fighter jet program has entered its final testing phase. This 4.5-generation fighter, developed at a cost of \$8.5 trillion won (\$6.5 billion), has completed supersonic flight trials and weapons integration testing, with the first operational squadron planned for deployment by 2026.

The Hyundai Rotem K2 Black Panther main battle tank continues to gain international recognition, with Poland ordering 180 units in addition to 1,000 K2PL variants to be produced under license locally. The tank features a 120mm smoothbore gun, composite armor, and an advanced fire control system, successfully competing in markets previously dominated by Western manufacturers.

South Korea has carefully balanced its strategic relationships, strengthening its U.S.

alliance through expanded joint exercises while maintaining diplomatic channels with China. This sophisticated approach includes participating in trilateral security discussions with Japan and China aimed at reducing regional tensions.

The Korean Defense Industrial Technology Center has made significant advancements in emerging technologies, allocating 240 billion won (\$176 million) for quantum technology development and successfully testing a 20-kilowatt laser weapon system designed for drone interception.

South Korea's export success is bolstered by enhanced financing mechanisms, with government-backed loan programs providing \$5.3 billion in export credits. The Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency has established dedicated defense export offices in 12 countries to facilitate international sales.

Through strategic investments, technological innovation, and balanced diplomatic engagement, South Korea has transformed itself from a security dependent nation to an influential actor in global defense affairs, demonstrating how focused military modernization can enhance both national security and economic prosperity.

Figures at a glance  
Defense Budget 2025-  
\$71.3 trillion won (\$41.9 billion)

Defense Exports 2023-  
\$17.3 billion

Quantum Technology Development Budget-  
240 billion won (\$176 million)



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# Blue Whale

## The New Frontier in High-Speed Unmanned Surface Vessels

The Blue Whale represents a leap forward in naval unmanned technology: a high-speed submersible unmanned surface vessel (USV) designed to dominate the gray zones between surface and subsurface operations. Developed by China's Harbin Engineering University in collaboration with key defense contractors, the Blue Whale is part of a growing trend toward hybrid naval platforms capable of stealthy, autonomous missions across multiple domains.

### Main Features and Capabilities

At its core, the Blue Whale is designed to perform both high-speed surface navigation and limited submerged operations. The vessel is equipped with:

- **Hybrid Propulsion Systems:** Allowing seamless transition between surface sprinting (at estimated speeds over 50 knots) and submerged stealth movement.

- **Autonomous Navigation and Mission Systems:** Powered by advanced AI algorithms for real-time decision-making, obstacle avoidance, and adaptive mission execution.

- **Low-Observable Design:** Featuring a radar-absorbing hull and minimized infrared signature to evade detection.

- **Modular Payload Bays:** Capable of carrying surveillance equipment, electronic warfare suites, or even lightweight torpedoes depending on the mission profile.



### Operational Use Cases

The Blue Whale is designed for a variety of interesting applications, including:

- **Maritime Surveillance and Reconnaissance:** Gathering intelligence while remaining difficult to detect.

- **Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW):** Deploying sonobuoys or acting as a forward scout.

- **Electronic Warfare and Decoy Operations:** Disrupting enemy radar and communications or mimicking larger naval signatures.

- **Special Operations Support:** Providing insertion or retrieval support for covert missions in contested waters.

### Hidden Edge: Submerged Endurance

While details are classified, open-source analysis suggests that Blue Whale may feature a diesel-electric air-independent propulsion (AIP) module for submerged endurance far exceeding typical USVs. This would allow the vessel to loiter underwater for extended periods, performing surveillance or waiting to ambush enemy vessels — a capability traditionally reserved for submarines.

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