

# Volatile Partnerships in a Multipolar World

## Implications for India's Security

The recent pivot in Pakistan-U.S. relations is reshaping the South Asia's strategic landscape presenting new challenges and opportunities among the regional players primarily India and China. Pakistan army chief Asim Munir made two high-profile visits to the U.S. in less than two months meeting top political and military leaders to discuss counterterrorism, energy, and trade. Although it looks pragmatic ties, it goes beyond security to economic cooperation such as recent oil deal and potential critical minerals partnership. In a striking move, Pakistan nominated President Trump for the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize for his diplomatic efforts in brokering ceasefire between India and Pakistan, which India absolutely denies the involvement of the America. However, Pakistan haven't realized the challenges persist as U.S. tariffs on Pakistani Imports imposed in April threatening over \$1 billion in annual losses.

At the same time, Pakistan's 'all-weather' strategic partnership with China remains robust anchored by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that China has invested billions in infrastructure, energy, and special economic zones with bilateral trade reaching \$20.76 billion. However, strains are emerging as security threats to Chinese workers in Pakistan increased. Though Pakistan reaffirmed the ties with Washington won't compromise ties with Beijing, the Islamabad leaning toward the U.S. may test the patience of China.

On the other side, India and China realigning their diplomatic relations accelerating border disengagement talks and increasing trade ties amid America's unfair tariffs on India. The visit of Narendra Modi to China for SCO summit would kickstart the reset, as China sees value in supporting India to dilute the West's view of New Delhi as a counterweight to Beijing, evident in frameworks like QUAD. Even, China voiced against U.S. tariffs on India signalling a strategic pivot to mitigate isolation.

How do these stands interact? First, Pakistan's outreach to the U.S. could give Beijing an ease to keep the New Delhi engaged while it is the only

country that United States consolidating as a counterweight to China. Conversely, China would understand relying on a single South Asian partner invites leverage as it witnessing Islamabad's warmth with Washington. Hence, it diversifies limited cooperation with India on trade facilitation, rare earths, or civil aviation link which could be a cheap hedge.

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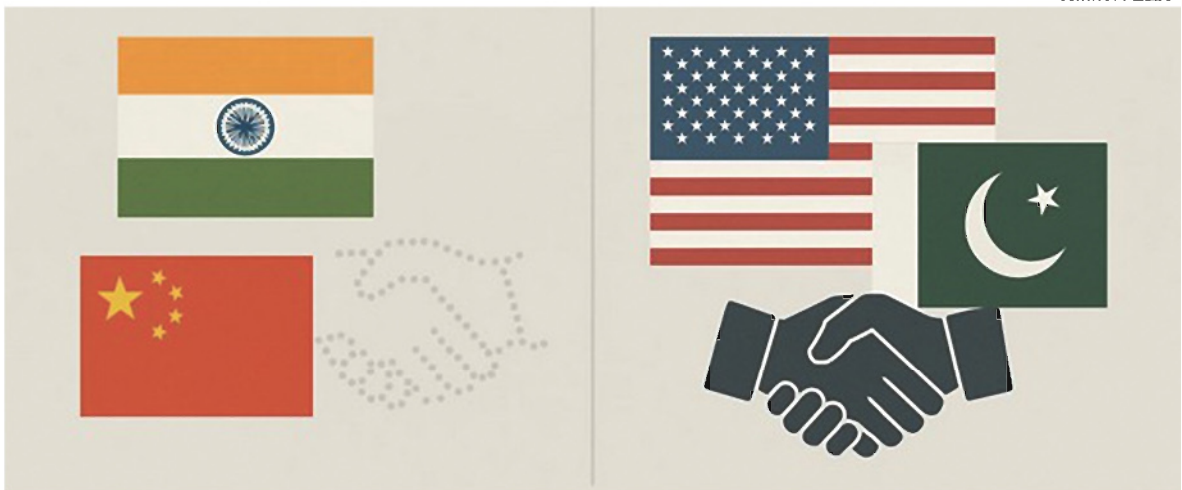
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Second, economics become a new theatre of security. The U.S. tariffs amplified India's incentives to widen options beyond the U.S. market while China can offer targeted relief such as materials, logistics, and regulatory fixes in ways that are politically reversible if the border disputes rise again. But the softening economy could also bring security concerns on technology, data, and vendor footprints that the New Delhi has been hardening over the years.

Third, the U.S. tie with Pakistan may unlock IMF confidence and niche military refurbishments, whereas China retains scale financing, infrastructure, and political insulations in multilateral forums. Pakistan must leverage with one to improve terms with the other.

Ultimately, these shifts epitomize the volatile nature of alliances in a multipolar world. Trump's 'America First' policies risk pushing India toward China undermining Indo-Pacific strategy. India should exploit the wedge while keeping the border stabilized and avoid signalling drift away from the Indo-Pacific coalition even if it maintains cool temperature with China. India must remain diversifying its dependencies whether the U.S., or China, or Russia, or other players so that it can leverage over its strategic autonomy and national security choices.

Author: LEA



# India Holds the Line

## as Nepal Seeks Leverage Through SCO



Nepal's renewed push for full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has revived debates in Kathmandu over how best to use multilateral forums to amplify its diplomatic presence. Foreign policy analyst Dr. Rupak Sapkota has gone a step further, urging Nepal to leverage this platform to press for dialogue on its long-disputed frontier with India - Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura.

Yet, when viewed from India's lens, the matter looks strikingly different. New Delhi has consistently treated these territories as integral parts of India, backed by its unbroken administrative and security control for decades. The revision of Nepal's official map in 2020 was dismissed in India as an "artificial" assertion, lacking the weight of historical evidence. By its reckoning, the controversy is not a fresh dispute but a cartographic provocation that complicates, rather than advances, dialogue.

This explains why India has shown no inclination to reopen negotiations, despite the existence of bilateral mechanisms. India has clear principle: boundary matters are to be addressed bilaterally and away from external forums.

Any attempt by Nepal to internationalise the issue whether through multilateral bodies or appeals to third parties will be met with quiet but firm rejection. The deeper subtext here is not just about cartography but about leverage. Kathmandu hopes that aligning its border claims with its larger diplomatic ambitions at the SCO will provide it with greater bargaining power. However, India's calculus is rooted in continuity and territorial certainty. From Delhi's standpoint, conceding ground on Lipulekh, Kalapani, or Limpiyadhura would not only weaken its historical claim but also signal vulnerability in an already sensitive Himalayan frontier.

The clash, therefore, is not merely over lines on a map but over diplomatic strategy itself. Nepal views multilateral engagement as an opportunity to elevate its voice; India sees it as an intrusion into a bilateral matter. And while Kathmandu may seek to raise the issue in international forums, New Delhi has already signalled that its stance is immovable: Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura remain Indian territory, and no amount of external noise will shift that reality.

Author: Shruti Kaushik

# Hezbollah Blocks Islamabad Process

## Lebanon's Path to Peace is not processing

In Beirut, the echoes of conflict never seem to fade. On September 23, Hezbollah's Secretary General Naim Qassem dismissed the Lebanese government's cabinet resolution on the group's disarmament as "illegal" and nothing less than a foreign diktat. To him, the plan bears the fingerprints of Israel and America, not the will of the Lebanese people. His words were sharp, laced with defiance:

**"Ceasing resistance means surrendering to Israel."**

For Lebanon, a nation constantly caught between the grinding gears of regional power struggles, this dispute is more than a question of arms, it is a question of survival, sovereignty, and identity.

The Lebanese cabinet has sought to frame the disarmament process as a path toward stability, a way to ease tensions and pull the country back from the brink of perpetual confrontation. But Hezbollah, whose very existence was built around the narrative of resistance, views the move as betrayal. Qassem's rebuke was not just political theater; it was a declaration that his movement will not be stripped of its weapons so long as Israel's shadow lingers over the south.

What complicates the story further is Israel's reaction. Officials in Tel Aviv, after hearing of Beirut's intentions, signaled that if Lebanon follows through with this plan, Israel would reduce its military presence in the south. On the surface, this might appear as a rare concession. But in the labyrinth of Middle Eastern geopolitics, gestures are rarely straightforward. Israel's conditional promise is seen by many Lebanese as a trap to push Hezbollah toward disarmament while leaving the country exposed to future bargaining and pressure.

Qassem, however, has his own reality check: he points to five areas of southern Lebanese territory still under Israeli control. In his view, surrendering weapons before those lands are reclaimed would not just be naive, it would be

tantamount to abandoning Lebanon's dignity. The weight of history backs his claim. Hezbollah's legitimacy among its supporters was cemented during the years of open confrontation with Israel, when it presented itself as the only force capable of protecting Lebanese soil. To give up arms now would fracture the very foundation on which it stands. The backdrop of all this is a fragile ceasefire, negotiated months ago by France and the United States after Hezbollah entered the war alongside Hamas during the Gaza conflict. That war spilled into southern Lebanon, drawing the country into yet another cycle of violence.

For ordinary Lebanese citizens already battered by economic collapse, political dysfunction, and social despair. Many are weary of living in a country where decisions on war and peace are taken in speeches rather than institutions. Yet, in a twist typical of Lebanon's political theater, the government's move has paradoxically strengthened Hezbollah's narrative. By branding the cabinet's resolution as foreign-imposed, Qassem has cast himself once more as the guardian of national pride against outside interference. His words may polarize, but they resonate with those who see disarmament not as peace-building but as surrender.

**The story unfolding in Beirut is not simply about whether one militia keeps its weapons. It is about Lebanon's struggle to reconcile the demands of sovereignty with the pressures of geopolitics. It is about a nation forced to dance to the music of others while still trying to hold on to its own rhythm.**

Author: Shruti Kaushik

Islamabad this week was set to stage what it grandly called the 'Islamabad Process' a gathering of 36 Afghan exiles, opposition figures, and women activists originally scheduled for August 25-26, ostensibly designed to chart Afghanistan's future. The conference was postponed due to visa difficulties and reported pressure from the Afghan Taliban, but the planning alone revealed the charade at its heart. The Taliban, who actually govern Afghanistan, were deliberately excluded, along with most credible Afghan political actors still in the country.

The guest list told the real story of Pakistan's intentions. Among those invited were Habiburrahman Hekmatyar, former diplomat Nasir Ahmad Andisha, politician Mustafa Mastoor, and prominent women's rights activist Fawzia Koofi, all vocal critics of Taliban rule. The event was announced by Maria Sultan, President of the South Asia Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI), an Islamabad-based think tank that marketed the gathering as an inclusive dialogue while systematically excluding those who hold actual power in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has long cultivated its image as the indispensable power broker in Afghan affairs, but this latest plan resembled amateur theatre more than serious diplomacy. The timing made the charade even more transparent. Just days before the planned conference, Pakistan's foreign minister had sat in Kabul, courting the very Taliban officials he would later exclude from his own capital. There, he promised deeper bilateral cooperation and pledged to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor into Taliban-controlled territory. The whiplash from collaboration to exclusion revealed a foreign policy adrift in contradictions.

**Diplomatic Reactions Expose the Farce**

The diplomatic community's response laid bare the meeting's questionable legitimacy. Even former U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad opposed the gathering, drawing sharp rebukes from invited participants. Fawzia Koofi, defending her participation, argued that 'engagement with neighboring countries is crucial for influencing Afghanistan's future' and called it "an opportunity to build trust between Afghans and Pakistanis". Yet her own words inadvertently highlighted the meeting's central flaw: how can one influence a country's future while deliberately excluding its government?

The Taliban's reaction was predictably hostile. The postponement came amid reported

Taliban pressure on Pakistani authorities, demonstrating that Kabul retains enough leverage over Islamabad to derail events it opposes. This alone should have served as a wake-up call about who truly holds influence in the relationship.

Events since the planned conference have only deepened the absurdity. Kabul has accused Pakistan of launching drone strikes in Nangarhar and Khost provinces, killing civilians and prompting angry summons for Islamabad's ambassador. Pakistan's response? Deafening silence. The spectacle of a nation simultaneously courting and bombing its neighbor perfectly captures the incoherence at the heart of Pakistani strategy.

**A Fragile State Playing Regional Puppetmaster**

Perhaps most tellingly, Pakistan's attempt to orchestrate Afghanistan's peace unfolds against the backdrop of its own mounting crises. This is a government surviving on International Monetary Fund bailouts and foreign loans, presiding over economic collapse and political upheaval. Street protests demand change while militants wage insurgency along the western frontier, stretching Pakistan's military thin. It's a state barely managing its own stability, yet presuming to engineer another nation's future.

The deeper irony cuts both ways. For Afghans, the pattern is achingly familiar: once again, their fate is being scripted not in Kabul but in neighboring capitals, by actors who treat Afghan sovereignty as a negotiable commodity. As Koofi noted, Afghan women live under "one of the most repressive" systems, yet the solution being proposed is more external interference, not genuine Afghan agency.

For Pakistan, the episode serves as an unwitting mirror, reflecting a country desperately projecting influence abroad to mask its weakness at home. The postponement only underscored this reality when even a gathering of Taliban opponents cannot proceed without the Taliban's tacit approval, who is really in charge?

The Islamabad Process represents everything wrong with external approaches to Afghanistan: a gathering of exiles planning for a country they don't control, organized by a neighbor that can't control itself, opposed by the very government they claim to represent alternatives to. With the meeting now pushed to late September, Pakistan has more time to consider whether hosting shadow governments serves any purpose?

Author: Shruti Kaushik

# The Mask of Culture, the Machinery of War

Central Asia in 2025 is not what it was a decade ago. The once predictable balance Russia holding the military reins, China the economic muscle, is being disrupted by a quieter but sharper player: Turkey. Ankara insists it is only reviving Turkic brotherhood, a natural extension of shared culture and language. But beneath the slogans of unity, officials and military sources point to a more calculated ambition: turning cultural diplomacy into military dependency.

A telling episode came in July 2025, when Istanbul hosted the first-ever Organisation of Turkic States (OTS) defense industry forum. On paper, it was about "cooperation." In practice, it was a showroom of Turkish firepower. Drones, armored vehicles, and missile systems were laid out not as sales pitches but as tools of partnership "brotherly support" that blurs the line between civilian diplomacy and military penetration.

The impact was immediate. In May 2025, Kazakhstan's Victory Day parade rolled out Turkish-made TAIMAS 8x8 and AIBAR 4x4 armored vehicles. For decades, these parades were dominated by Russian tanks, a public symbol of Moscow's grip. Replacing them with Turkish machines was not mere procurement; it was a statement which Kazakhstan signaling as a readiness to rewrite its defense script.

Intelligence sources describe Turkey's approach as "incremental entanglement." Unlike Russia, Ankara rarely demands upfront payments. Instead, it offers barter, favorable loans, joint production lines, or in some cases, outright donations. Free shipments of equipment, once framed as gifts of kinship, serve a deeper purpose: they bind local militaries into maintenance contracts, training programs, and supply chains that only Ankara can fulfill.

This model is the product of Turkey's own trajectory. Shut out of the American F-35 program in 2019, Ankara invested heavily in building its own defense sector. By 2025, its drones had already shaped wars in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Now Central Asia is the proving ground — less about profit, more about building a Turkic security ecosystem with Ankara as the anchor.

Beijing watches uneasily as a NATO member plants defense ties along its Belt and Road arteries. Western capitals face a paradox: Turkey's push weakens Russian and Chinese influence, yet Ankara does so on its own terms, serving interests not always aligned with NATO or Washington.

The open question is whether Central Asian leaders truly grasp the trade-off. What is framed as "brotherhood" in hidden strategic captivity overtime.

Author: Shruti Kaushik





## Cyber Jihad Movement (CJM)

India's digital infrastructure is facing a critical threat from a radical cyber collective known as the **Cyber Jihad Movement (CJM)**. Recently, CJM's leadership operating from Pakistan and allied regions formally pledged allegiance to **Al-Qaeda** and its Emir, **Shaykh Sayf al-Adil**, marking a dangerous escalation in ideological and operational intent.

The announcement, posted on CJM's Telegram channel on **August 22**, signals a shift from regional hacktivism to transnational jihadist coordination. CJM declared its support for global conflicts in **Gaza, Sudan, and Yemen**, while reaffirming its cyber campaign against India under banners like **#OpGhazwatulHind** and **#OpCounterAttack**.

CJM's newly created Twitter account follows only **Team Insane Pakistan**, a group previously linked to cyberattacks on Indian government portals. Posts include explicit anti-India rhetoric, including threats against the BJP and references to "oppression" by Indian authorities. Historical data reveals CJM previously operated under the name rebranded as **KJDF**, aligned with **Sunni Islamism**.

Most alarming are CJM's claims of breaching servers of the **Punjab & Haryana High Court** and the **Andhra Pradesh High Court**. The group alleges access to:

- Over 2 million case records
- 2 million FIR entries
- Judicial officer databases
- User login credentials
- Additional sensitive legal datasets

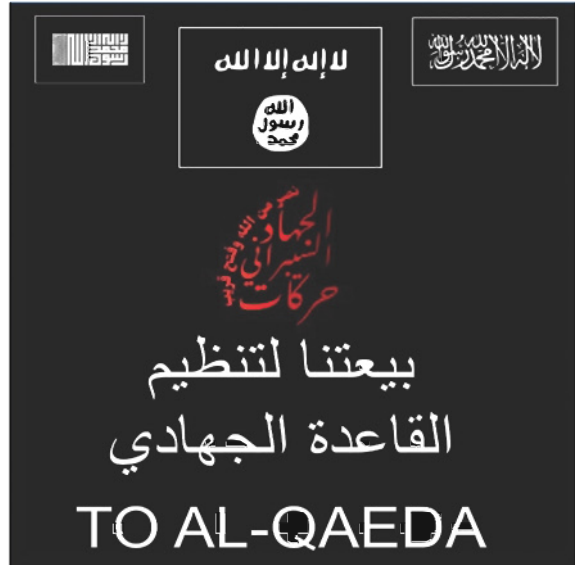
These claims, if verified, represent a direct assault on India's legal backbone and raise serious concerns about data integrity, privacy, and national security.

CJM's propaganda strategy includes professionally edited recruitment videos and encrypted outreach via platforms like Signal. The group's Shura Council, led by **Abu Fudayl al-Sharkasi**, oversees operations across seven regional factions, including a dedicated unit for the Indian subcontinent.

A recent statement from CJM's General Emir, **Abu Muhammad al-Harbi**, calls for unity among Islamic hacktivists and urges attacks against **"Hindus, Christians, and Jews,"** invoking Qur'anic justification for cyber jihad.

This convergence of ideology, propaganda, and technical capability marks a turning point. Indian agencies must treat CJM as a high-priority threat with transnational backing, capable of coordinated cyber offensives targeting critical infrastructure.

Author: LEA



# Pakistan's Dhaka Turn What is Means for India



economic openings.

Since the Hasina ousting of 2024, the Pakistan and Bangladesh bilateral trade sees a significant rise (over 35%) from \$628 million in 2024 to \$865 million in 2025. On the other hand, exports of India to Bangladesh decreased by \$111M (11.3%) from \$986M to \$875M, while imports decreased by \$59.4M (39.2%) from \$152M to \$92.1M. This is the result of few factors including strained relationship and India's boost for domestic production.

For Bangladesh, it is a pragmatic approach. We have seen from the beginning of interim government that wants to diversify it dependent and leaning towards China, Pakistan and other countries. Reviving connectivity with Pakistan may offer new trade routes since India limited Bangladesh's export from its ports to third countries.

The Delhi-Dhaka relation is deep rooted in trade, energy and border management which Pakistan can not substitute. So still, unlikely to jettison its deep economic and geographic dependence on India. Thus, the recent consensus is more about pragmatic diversification than realignment.

There is no direct security related agreement between Dhaka and Islamabad signalling no

(for now) defence cooperation or intelligence-sharing. However, MoU on think tanks, press, and diplomatic training suggest ISI's likely involvement in false narratives, misinformation and border security issues.

For India, it should observe the development warily. As Bangladeshi defence delegations visited Pakistan in the early January 2025 with a desire of holding 32 JF-17 Thunder jets which is co-developed with China, may raises military concerns in the India's east. Also, the alleged collaboration of ISI with Dhaka may fuel the northeast insurgency.

Additionally, recent rapprochements empower Islamic groups linked with Pakistan to destabilize Indian borders. The June trilateral meeting with China in Yunnan, increasing relations with Pakistan looks further inclusion for Beijing's 'String of Pearls' eastward, encircling India amid CPEC and Myanmar ties. India better finds a way to re-energize bilateral diplomacy that ensures Dhaka sees India as a first responsive partner.

The Pakistan-Bangladesh thaw is nascent. Yet, it matters in South Asia's competitive neighbourhood. For Pakistan, it is a diplomatic relief that softens isolation. For Bangladesh, it is a pragmatic hedge to expand options. For India, it is a reminder that even once a close partner will diversify if options are available. The real test will start when the trade agreements translate into volume, and China uses the opening to deepen its footprint. For now, New Delhi can remain unalarmed but proactive for a future.

Author: LEA

# Maritime Power Projection What IFR and MILAN 2026 Holds for India

India's maritime strategy enters a new decisive phase as International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026 and MILAN 2026 on the horizon, the Indian Navy determined not just showing naval capabilities but also India's growing role as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific region. In recent years, India accelerated its naval strengths including indigenous shipbuilding, submarine programs, and forward deployments which is perfectly aligns with geopolitical shifts such as competition to growing influence of China in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and collaborations like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). Hence, events like IFR and MILAN serves as a platform for demonstrating power projections as well as considered to be the instruments of diplomacy, deterrence and doctrine articulation. As events scheduled for February 2026 in Visakhapatnam, these events underscores India's ambition to assert maritime dominance and build strategic cooperation.

### Maritime Power Projection: the strategic context

Maritime Power Projection in a sense a country's ability to influence beyond its littoral space using naval capabilities enabling the protection of sea lines of communications (SLOC), deterring adversaries, and support for diplomatic objectives.

For India, officially a nation with over 11098.81 km of coastline (updated by the Survey of India) and depend on sea routes as it handling around 95% of the country's trade by volume and 70% by value, maritime power is integral and inevitable to national security frameworks and economic prosperity. As mentioned in the Indian Maritime Doctrine, India's power projection emphasizes becoming a net security provider in the IOR, countering emerging threats and fostering regional stability.

### What is International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026?

It is a grand congregation of navies of the world countries, assemble to demonstrate their fleets including warships, aircraft and submarines fostering goodwill and interoperability, and will be hosted by India. The naval traditions evolved from British, involves presidential review. The last time India hosted an IFR in 2016 in Visakhapatnam where 50 countries were participated. Now, the invitation has been extended to 145 countries.

### Why it matters for India?

For India, it is not just pageantry but a strategic tool for power projection.

• **Diplomatic Signalling:** Inviting allies and partners including QUAD, ASEAN, African littorals, European powers demonstrate India's ability to bring nations together.

• **Naval Interoperability:** Port visits, tactical manoeuvres and communication drills enhance and strengthen interoperability mechanisms



with other navies.

• **Soft Power:** It allows the Indian Navy to exhibit indigenous assets such as aircraft carriers like INS Vikrant, Diving Support Vessel INS Nistar, and submarines like P-75, underlines India's technological self-reliance, operational readiness and the rise of defence industry.

• **Theatre of Deterrence:** Presence of advanced fleets from various countries would projects the unequivocal stance against coercive behaviour in IOR like China's assertiveness.

### What is MILAN 2026?

MILAN means meeting, a biennial meeting of multilateral naval exercises initiated by back in 1995 to promote cooperation and mutual understanding, with participations of five navies, and the last edition 2024 witnessed 50 countries, focused on high-end tactical training, manoeuvring drills and air-defence operations.

### Why it matters for India?

• **Maritime synergy:** Coinciding with IFR, it emphasizes maritime security, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief (HADR), Anti-submarine warfare (ASW), and maritime domain awareness (MDA) sharing.

• **Coalition building:** Hosting MILAN fortify its role as a convener of 'friendly navies', aligning with Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision.

• **Capability Demonstration:** It helps to tests India's own operational readiness, ranging from multi-carrier operations to joint amphibious landings, which are crucial for incidents like piracy in the Gulf of Aden or tensions in the South China Sea.

• **Countering Narratives:** It helps countering narratives of Indian isolation by including diverse participants from QUAD allies to ASEAN nations, fostering a rule-based maritime order.

### What IFR and MILAN 2026 emphasizes?

Diplomatic Leverage and Soft Power  
Both events epitomize India's maritime diplomacy, a crucial pillar of its foreign policy over the last few decades. By hosting around 145 countries, India positions itself as a bridge between Global South and Global North enhancing bilateral cooperations with port calls and joint ventures. While the IFR build goodwill, the MILAN's exercise convert into tangible partnerships such as technology transfers and intelligence sharing.

### Geopolitical Context

As IOR is a contested space with China expanding Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by establishing ports in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Djibouti, India counters it with strategy like Agalega airstrip in Mauritius, enhancing surveillance and power projection. Both IFR and MILAN amplify this by rallying partners and friends against coercive tactics, promoting mutual respect and multipolar order. For

instance, the U.S. participation in MILAN underscores Indo-Pacific cooperation while inviting BRICS nations balance India's alignment with all possible options.

### Demonstration of Defence Capabilities and Deterrence

For any country, visible strength is crucial for power projection. IFR will demonstrate India's fleet expansion including projects like 15B destroyers and Kalvari-class submarines offset any littoral threats including Chinese carriers, while MILAN with focus on complex manoeuvres, tests interoperability and preparing for coalition warfare, prevents adventurism as we have witnessed India's response to Houthi attacks or Chinese incursions, and supports freedom of navigation operations.

### Challenges and Future Outlook

Despite hosting dozens of navies, it requires robust port infrastructure, hospitality and C4ISR integration. Factors like budget constraints and environmental concerns from large-scale events may poses challenges to the government. Additionally, there would be a high chance of cyberattacks, espionage or may terrorists targeting visiting fleets that would put India under pressure.

IFR and MILAN 2026 are pivotal to India's maritime power projections and can be considered strategic milestone. It reiterates India as a responsible stakeholder in Indo-Pacific security, a credible partner capable of interoperability with world's advanced navies, and technology leader with indigenous capabilities. In the age of competition, both IFR and MILAN are the opportunities to declare that India is ready to not only safeguard its waters but also shape the maritime frameworks of the 21st century.

Author: LEA







# Betting on India

## Transforming Lost Opportunities into a Semiconductor Revolution

Semiconductor, often referred to as digital 'crude oil' of the modern era, has profoundly shaped the global dynamics of economies, technologies and geopolitics. India, a rapid-paced economy with enormous talents and resources started to strengthen self-reliance in all sectors in recent years due to the volatile nature of world politics. On the auspicious Independence Day of India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that it will roll out its first Made in India semiconductor chip by the end of the year 2025, recalling the history where the attempt of building semiconductor industry a few decades ago were 'killed at birth' while other nations including Taiwan and South Korea built thriving chip industries.

For the country that missed a revolution at infancy, this announcement not just a milestone but a strategic pivot with profound economic, technological and geopolitical implications. As the world contend with supply chain vulnerabilities exposed during the COVID19 pandemic, US-China tensions, Russia-Ukraine war and the recent Trump's tariff tantrums, it is inevitable for a growing economy like India showing resilience, positioning it as a key player in the global tech ecosystem.

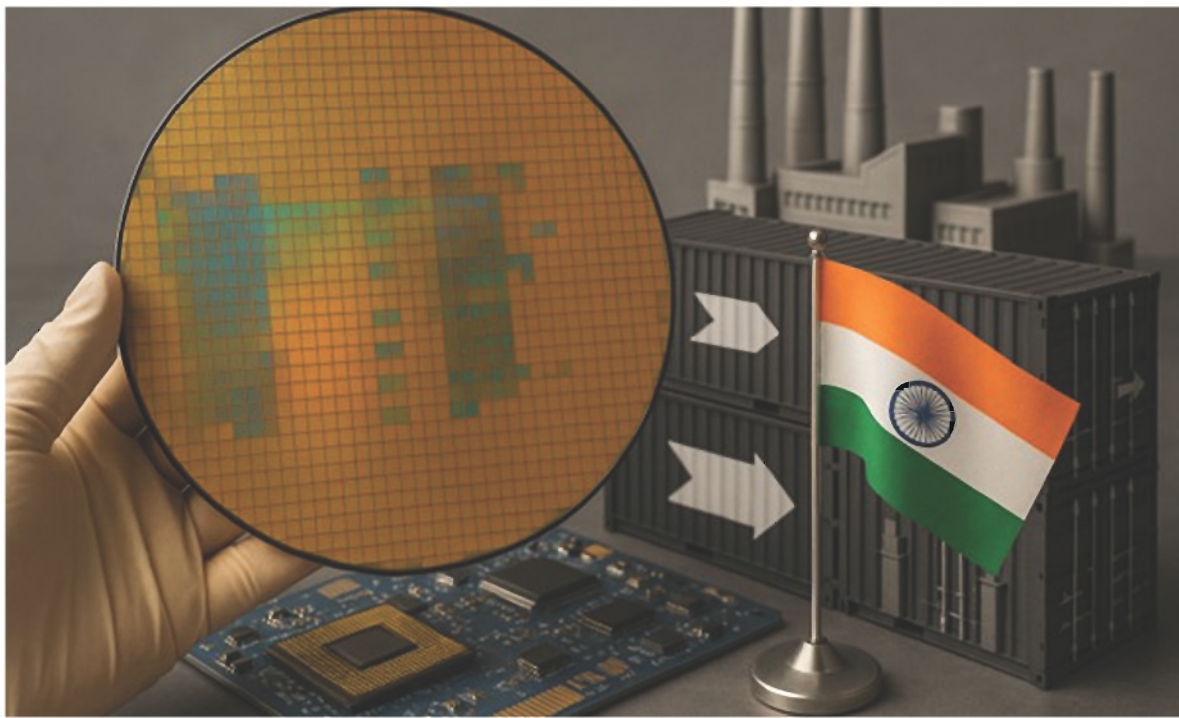
### The Lost Decades

India's semiconductor race has been always cat and mouse game from the early 1960. Fairchild Semiconductor, one of the giants in transistor and semiconductor back then, had talk with India for building its silicon-based fabrication unit. However, the slow response from the government, logistical challenges and corruption made sure Fairchild looking out somewhere else ended up in Malaysia. Another opportunity that India missed in 1969 when Intel planned to establish a semiconductor manufacturing facility but withdrawn its plan due to illogical exports restrictions and other factors.

Though, India had Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) that established fabrication unit which produced silicon-based chips, but predominantly germanium transistors. During the same time the cheap alternatives from Taiwan and China prospers as the government missed to protect BEL. After that there are lot of initiatives, partnerships have been tried but could not stand before price competition from China and Taiwan. After that, India handled fabrication through Semiconductor Complex Ltd. (SCL), Chandigarh, in 1984 which produced ICs majorly for defence purposes. However, an unknown fire at SCL in 1989 shattered the India's semiconductor ride for decades. Many report strongly suggests that lack of government empathy, bureaucratic hurdles, corruption, and logistical difficulties were the factors destroying the hope for semiconductor industry in India.

### India's current strategy

The COVID19 pandemic and the war between nations exposed the supply chain vulnerability and India realized started acting upon it by introducing series of initiatives to lay



the foundation hoping to become one of the semiconductor hubs of Asia.

National Electronics Policy 2019 was the stepping stone emphasized the creation of globally competitive Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) in India, aimed to boosting domestic production, attracting investments and promote exports. It also focuses on developing core electronic components like semiconductors, fostering innovation and enhancing skilled manpower.

In 2021, India Semiconductor Mission launched with the outlay of ₹76,000 crore, has approved 10 semiconductor units so far, focusing on fabrication (fab), assembly, testing, marking and packaging (ATMP).

Some of the key initiatives including Tata's Dholera fab (Gujarat, ₹91,000 crore) with Taiwan's Powerchip for 28nm chips, Micron Technology's ATMP unit in Sanand (Gujarat, ₹22,516 crore), SiCSem's Silicon Carbide fab (Odisha, ₹4,600 crore), CG Power and Industrial Solutions Limited, a company that has entered the Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) sector in Gujarat and the proposed Israeli's Tower Semiconductor's collaboration with the Adani Group, is planning to establish a \$10 billion semiconductor fabrication plant in India.

These initiatives are likely backed by subsidies covering up to 50% of project costs along with state-level incentives for land, water and power. Machinery and fabs are provided with zero import duty.

To improve design ecosystem, The Design Linked Incentive (DLI) and Chips to Startup (C2S) programs have committed ₹234 crore to 22 startups, raising ₹380 crore in venture capital.

Examples include Netrasemi (₹107 crore for IoT chips) and Mindgrove Technologies (₹85 crore for CCTV chips). Moreover, Training of 85,000 engineers by 2026 and events like SEMICON India 2025 (300+ exhibitors, 18 countries) signal global confidence.

Till now, ten projects worth of ₹1.6 lakh crore already have been approved, and these efforts are aimed for \$110 billion semiconductor market by 2030.

### Why it matters for India

Since chips are the heart of advanced technologies like AI, EV, Defence technology and others, domestic ecosystems reduce import dependency and create jobs. The domestic semiconductor market weighed beneficial to any country in terms of growth of economy and technology and the same goes for India.

### Economic growth

**Job Creation and GDP:** It is estimated that the industry could create 50000 direct jobs and a million indirect jobs by 2030. With semiconductors contributes \$2.5 trillion to global electronics, India's entry could add \$100 billion to its GDP annually by localizing production.

**Reduce import dependency:** India imports nearly 95% of semiconductors costing \$20-\$50 billion annually. Global disruption like pandemic or wars could put us behind. Therefore, Local production could strike 50% percent of imports, saving foreign exchanges while bolstering rupee values.

**Alternative export hub:** As an export hub of ATMP, India could export chips to ASEAN and Europe while attracting FDI worth of \$50 million, aligning with "Make in India" initiatives.

### Technology Growth

**Innovation Ecosystem:** Semiconductor industries will espouse the India's ambitions in technological advancements like AI, 5G, EVs and defence reducing vulnerabilities in critical sectors.

**Skill Development and R&D:** with fabs and R&D centres, India can attract global engineering talents, becoming a talent powerhouse alongside manufacturing.

### Geopolitical significance

Semiconductors are the new oil of digital world that likely drives geopolitical landscapes since almost all the advanced technologies depend on it including mobile technology, IT, defence, space etc. Hence, semiconductors are not just about economy anymore, but it is about power.

Currently, China shares 60% of rare earth dominance while Taiwan holds 90% of advance chip share. As we are witnessing the U.S. and China weaponizing technology in their rivalry, relying on these countries alone put any country in danger. Since, India maintaining neutral stance with many countries and the support of QUAD which could attract tech transfers, it is more likely that India can be seen as a counterweight to China.

Moreover, domestic production of potent chips for defence and critical sectors mitigating the risk from export controls or espionage. With Taiwan vulnerable to natural disaster and rival with China, India's fab could stabilize global supplies. Additionally, by exporting to ASEAN and Africa, India could strengthen its soft power amid China's Belt and Road Initiative.

### Lessons from global players

As of now, the United States, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China are the global players of semiconductor. As India determined to become the semiconductor hub, there are few lessons can be learned form them.

#### United States

The innovation pioneer who gave birth to semiconductor, having their tech clusters like Silicon Valley close to universities which attracts new innovations. India should develop similar hubs with reliable infrastructure.

Minimal bureaucratic hurdles enabled growth, but offshoring manufacturing caused set back which is addressed by CHIPS Act. India should also reduce excessive bureaucracy, paperwork or regulatory hurdles that slow down or complicate the process. Also, all the projects must be streamlined with ISM, a nodal agency.

**Lesson:** India must back research and design, not only factories.

#### Japan

Once a dominant in memory chips with over 50% global share in 1980s, Japan stumbled with complacency and trade friction with the US. However, it become excelled in materials and equipment.

**Lesson:** India should stay agile, diversify strengths and avoid over-dependence on one segment.

#### South Korea

Korea become a global power by the creation of champions like Samsung, SK Hynix by aligning state policy in memory domain.

**Lesson:** India also better national players like Tata, Adani, Vedanta while avoiding bureaucratic delays.

Author: LEA

## A Tentative Thaw India's Regional Reset Ahead of SCO Summit

Amid growing international pressure and domestic security concerns, India and China relations marked a notable thaw as both countries pursued détente through renewed diplomatic channels, confidence building measures along the border, and cautious willingness to do deescalate the tensions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his last address called for strategic reset based on mutual respect and regional stability.

Revival of direct flights, restart of border talks and the high-stakes Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit epitomized the intent of mutual pragmatism.

The upcoming SCO summit test whether this détente reshape into confidence-building at the border. Without demonstrable de-escalation along the LOC, this could be dismissed as tactical manoeuvres.

Neither China nor India seeks alliance, nevertheless, both recognizes the calibrated engagement is insurance against sudden external shocks. Whether selective easing on trade restrictions, rare earth cooperation, or transport links, India should tread it carefully keeping sensitive sectors in mind such as telecommunications and infrastructure which India diligently diversified over the years.

Therefore, this tentative consensus is less that reconciliation that about recalibration, a strategic hedging as Asia's great powers navigates through an uncertain global order.

Author: LEA

## Forging Cyber Ready Alliances: India-Japan Pact Amid Global Trade Turmoil

The bilateral relationship between India and Japan takes step forward reflecting a strategic pivot towards building cyber-resilient alliances in an increasingly fractured global order. The partnership now extends beyond the conventional defence ties into contemporary domains such as artificial intelligence, space, and most importantly cyber security.

For New Delhi, the stakes are high as it has been witnessing rapid rise of cyber-attacks in the Indian infrastructure, from power grids to satellite systems, mostly originating from countries like Pakistan and China. With Japan's advanced cyber capabilities and expertise safeguarding critical supply chain, offers both technological front and a trusted partner in capacity-building.

This pact also intersects with Quad framework where cooperation on critical mineral is emerging amid Beijing's dominance. With the recent pragmatic alliance with China gives India access to rare earth, directly underpins the development of semiconductors with already experienced Japanese technology, and batteries, defences systems which are all about cyber.

The convergence with Japan delivers two dividends. First, it diversifies security and technology partners as global economic nationalism threatens supply chains. Second, it integrates cyber preparedness into a broader national security planning. This partnership is underline that the modern conflict not limited with missiles and troops but also extends to firewalls, AI-enabled defence grids and resilient digital economies. In the growing uncertain geopolitics, the pragmatic efforts are inevitable for India.

Author: LEA

# Turkey's Steel Dome

## Why it Matters for India?

In the late August, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan unveiled the indigenously build air defence system 'Steel Dome' in Ankara, loosely modelled on Iron Dome of Israel, integrates missile interceptors, anti-drone weapons, and AI-enabled networks to tackle the regional threats.

For the NATO country which is long dependent on U.S. Patriots, turned over to S-400 missiles, got cut off from F-35 fighter jet program and sanctions as consequences, it is not just a milestone but a political message showing Ankara's intends to be a self-sufficient arms producer and exporter.

The Steel Dome is integrated with long-range SIPER missiles, HISAR systems, anti-drone microwave weapons, and AI-enabled command networks. Forty-seven platforms have already been delivered to Turkish armed forces and plans for become a largest defence production hub for the Europe. Ankara's ambition is clear. They do not just want to defend their skies but sell this technology abroad, and that is where India's concern begins.

### The Pakistan Factor

It is conspicuous Turkey's deepening ties with Pakistan; India's perennial adversary requires a

very little imagination to see Pakistan lobbying for access to the Steel Dome if the system proven successful. Given Ankara's consistent blackening of Islamabad from Kashmir to FATF deliberations, defence aid much like the Bayraktar drones that fuelled the "Operation Sindoore" in May. In that brief but brutal conflict, Pakistan unleashed hundreds of Turkish-supplied UAVs against Indian targets only to thwarted by New Delhi's Akashteer defenses. Yet, the episode underscored the Turkey's willingness to arm anti-India actors.

For Islamabad, integration of Turkish systems with its existing Chinese-supplied HQ-9 and LY-80 missile defenses would create an additional layer of shield defending terrorist launchpad along the Line of Control and complicating Indian precision strikes.

### India's Answer: Sudarshan Chakra

New Delhi has already signalled it intend to build an indigenous equivalent "Mission Sudarshan Chakra", dubbed India's Iron Dome, announced on August 15 as India's own "Shield and Sword" aimed countering Pakistani cruise missiles and Chinese hypersonic threats. But it will not be ready until 2030 gives a prior hand to Pakistan which more likely integrate at least a

semi-functional Steel Drome years before Sudarshan Chakra comes online.

Turkey's move indicates weaponizing of defence exports for geopolitical influence, just as Bayraktar drones reshaped wars in Libiya, Syria, and Nagorno-Karabakh, the addition of Steel Dome could be another tool of export strategic diplomacy.

India's response must be swift and multifaceted. First, it should accelerate Sudarshan Chakra mission a symbol of self-reliance, much like Turkey's own defence narrative. Second, it should strengthen ties with Israel, France and the U.S. to ensure its own air shield is step ahead. Additionally, put diplomatic pressure on Turkey via partners and arms and business boycotts. Moreover, India's support for Armenia against Turkish-backed Azerbaijan already counters Ankara's influence.

In the end, the contest is not just about air defence but who controls the skies of South Asia. If Turkey can export its Steel Dome to Pakistan, it won't be just selling the weapon but will be reshaping India's threat environment. India's Sudarshan Chakra must rise as quick as possible as a strategic necessity.

Author: LEA

# Vietnam Lays Bricks Where China Breathes Fire

Vietnam is steadily testing China's dominance in the South China Sea. With new dredging and construction on eight reefs in the Nansha Qundao (Spratly Islands), Hanoi's reclamation work has now reached almost 70% of China's artificial island area is a dramatic rise in scale for a nation long seen as a smaller player in the dispute.

The latest push focuses on Anbo Reef, where Vietnam is turning shallow outcrops into medium-sized fortified islands equipped for military use. If the pace continues, Vietnam could soon rival or even surpass China's vast island-building footprint.

Beijing has reacted sharply on Monday, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun denounced the projects, declaring the Nansha Qundao as "China's inherent territory" and accusing Hanoi of "destabilizing peace."

But for Vietnam, this is about survival and sovereignty. By planting concrete on reefs, it is shoring up its maritime claims and refusing to be boxed in by China's expansion.

What emerges is an uneven contest like a fisherman casting his net against a dragon that rules the skies. The fisherman has no fire, but he knows the waters better, and every reef he anchors gives him ground the dragon cannot simply burn away.

In practice, this is becoming an arms race in concrete. Vietnam is pouring sand and cement into the sea, while China answers with



diplomatic fire and military patrols. Each side is hardening its presence, inch by inch, reef by reef.

The South China Sea is turning into a battlefield of construction. And Vietnam, once dismissed as too small to matter, is showing that even the fisherman's net can tighten if cast with enough resolve leaving the dragon with fewer moves than it expected.

Author: Shruti Kaushik



## The Dependency Trap

How China Weaponized a Submarine Sale Against Thailand



Bangkok's decision to finalize its long-stalled S26T submarine purchase from China marks a turning point in Southeast Asia's naval dynamics. What began as a \$390 million deal in 2017 has transformed into a showcase of Beijing's determination to export weapons free from Western constraints and Thailand's willingness to compromise in exchange for political continuity and military prestige.

The original plan hinged on German MTU engines, a trusted brand in submarine propulsion. However, Berlin blocked the export, citing the European Union's arms embargo on Beijing. By 2021, the submarine hull was more than halfway complete and two-thirds of the payment had already been made, leaving Thailand with an unfinished vessel and no engines.

China's response was decisive; it refused to let the deal collapse. Instead, Beijing offered its own CHD620 diesel engines, tested for 6,000 hours but lacking a proven combat record. For years, the Thai Navy remained skeptical, concerned about reliability risks. Beijing eventually sweetened the offer by extending warranty coverage from two to eight years, providing comprehensive training and maintenance guarantees, and pushing delivery to 2028. Bangkok ultimately capitulated. The Cabinet's recent approval demonstrates how limited options and sunk costs can compel governments to accept what they once rejected.

The timing of Thailand's decision proves crucial. Over the past month, China has aggressively expanded its naval reach through deepening ties with Pakistan, fast-tracking submarine deliveries to Bangladesh, and preparing to showcase new undersea drones and hypersonic missiles at its upcoming September 3 parade. Within this broader strategic context, the Thai submarine deal transcends a single vessel transaction. It signals Beijing's determination to demonstrate independence from Western suppliers while

binding Southeast Asian militaries to Chinese systems for decades to come.

The implications are far-reaching and immediate. Thailand has not operated a submarine since 1951. Its entry into the undersea domain shifts the regional balance in waters already contested by Vietnam's Russian Kilo-class submarines, Singapore's advanced German-designed AIP vessels, Indonesia's German-Korean hybrid platforms, and Myanmar's ex-Indian Kilo. With Bangkok now dependent on Chinese engines, training, and logistics, its navy will inevitably develop institutional reliance on Beijing as a subtle yet powerful form of strategic leverage.

For China, this represents a critical demonstration project. Should the engines perform effectively, Beijing will have eliminated one of its last technological vulnerabilities in submarine exports. Should they fail, Thailand bears the operational risks and potential embarrassment, while China still secures a regional navy within its sphere of influence.

For India, this episode underscores two strategic realities. First, the Indo-Pacific's submarine competition is accelerating, with each new entrant altering the strategic calculations surrounding critical chokepoints like the Malacca Strait and the Andaman Sea. Second, delivery credibility matters as much as technological capability. If India seeks to compete with China's defense exports through its own submarine programs and naval partnerships, timeliness and reliability will determine influence as decisively as hardware specifications.

Thailand may believe it has purchased a submarine, but it has actually acquired a long-term relationship of strategic dependence. In this transaction, China has once again demonstrated its ability to transform an engineering setback into a comprehensive geopolitical victory.

Author: Shruti Kaushik

# India and France Ink \$7B Jet Engine Deal

India has signed a landmark \$7 billion defense pact with France to co-develop and manufacture a next-generation jet engine, a move that underscores New Delhi's determination to shed its reliance on Russian arms and secure true technological sovereignty.

The agreement, finalized between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and French aerospace leader Safran, will deliver 120-kilonewton engines to power the upcoming fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA). Unusually, the deal includes full technology transfer, a rare concession in global aerospace, where engine know-how is tightly guarded.

### The Past

For decades, Russia dominated India's defense market. As recently as 2010–14, Russian systems accounted for 72% of India's imports, according to SIPRI data. That figure has since dropped to 36%, reflecting a deliberate recalibration. France, through its supply of Rafale fighters, helicopters, and now engine technology, has emerged as New Delhi's most dependable partner.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh confirmed the pact, framing it as a decisive leap toward India's ambition of producing its own fifth-generation fighter jets. "This is not just about aircraft. It is about building sovereign capability and reshaping India's defense future," Singh said at The Economic Times World Leaders Forum.

### • Strategic Autonomy:

The pact places India among a handful of nations with indigenous engine-building capability, reducing vulnerability to foreign suppliers.

### • Industrial Momentum:

Coupled with the AMCA prototype approval in May, hypersonic missile tests, and indigenous carrier programs, the deal strengthens India's bid to become a global defense hub.

### • Geopolitical Signal:

Paris is now firmly positioned as India's anchor partner, while Moscow faces a shrinking role in South Asia's defense calculus.



### Opportunities and Risks

The upside lies in sovereignty and self-reliance: mastering jet engine technology gives India long-term leverage in both military and industrial domains. It also deepens Indo-French ties at a time when both nations are recalibrating their global strategies.

The challenges remain significant. At \$7 billion, the program is costly and ambitious. Jet engine projects worldwide are notorious for delays, and while full transfer of technology is promised, the fine print of execution will determine whether India achieves true independence or faces fresh bottlenecks. Additionally, Russia is a long strategic supplier, may interpret the shift as a direct snub.

### The Bottom Line

The India–France jet engine pact is more than a defense contract. It is a strategic declaration:

**India no longer intends to rent power; it plans to build it. With France at its side, New Delhi is positioning itself not just as a regional heavyweight but as a rising global defense producer.**

Author: Shruti Kaushik

# Turkey Showcases GÖKTAN

Ground-Based Precision Strike System



Turkey has unveiled GÖKTAN, a new-generation ground-based precision impact system developed by ASELSAN in cooperation with Delta V, the country's leading hybrid rocket propulsion company.

The system adapts the TOLUN glider ammunition, originally designed for air-to-ground missions, into a ground-to-ground strike weapon by pairing it with a hybrid rocket engine. After launch, the rocket motor carries TOLUN into guided flight, where its wings unfold and it glides with pinpoint accuracy toward the target.

GÖKTAN offers 360-degree launch capability, waypoint navigation, sequential firing, and multi-target engagement, supported by integrated command-and-control systems. These features make it highly effective in dynamic combat scenarios.

Often compared to the U.S.-Swedish Ground-Launched Small Diameter Bomb (GLSDB), GÖKTAN distinguishes itself with hybrid propulsion technology, providing potential advantages in thrust control and extended range.

The system passed its first live-fire test on February 18, 2025 in Sinop, northern Turkey, when a TOLUN round successfully struck its target. At IDEF 2025, it was displayed on a self-propelled launch vehicle based on the Anadolu Seyit 8x8 platform an ASELSAN development independent of Roketsan's rocket launchers.

By merging ASELSAN's guidance expertise with Delta V's propulsion technology, GÖKTAN marks a leap forward in Turkey's bid for indigenous, long-range precision strike capabilities and strengthens its position in the global defense arena.

Author: Shruti Kaushik

## China's ZTZ-201 Tank Hybrid Power and AI on Display



dedicated counter-UAV turret.

Chinese media have also highlighted the tank's digital backbone. Its crew operates from a protected capsule, using augmented reality visors that provide a 360-degree view of the battlefield. Combined with AI overlays, this system allows operators to respond faster and coordinate more effectively with other units. The ZTZ-201 is designed not only as a fighting vehicle but also as a node in a wider digital combat network.

For regional observers, including India, the unveiling of the ZTZ-201 underscores Beijing's intent to prioritize mobility and adaptability in its land forces. A lighter tank with hybrid propulsion is naturally more suited to difficult terrain than traditional heavy armor, while its anti-drone focus reflects China's understanding of how modern warfare is changing.

Whether the ZTZ-201 can deliver on these promises remains an open question. Hybrid engines, unmanned turrets, and AI-based systems are advanced on paper but largely untested in real combat.

**For India's defense community, the ZTZ-201 is less a cause for alarm and more a reminder that the strategic environment along Asia's borders are changing, and that military innovation is increasingly being measured not in tons of armor but in intelligence, adaptability, and technological reach.**



Author: Shruti Kaushik

## Taliban Builds Secret Military Base in Kandahar

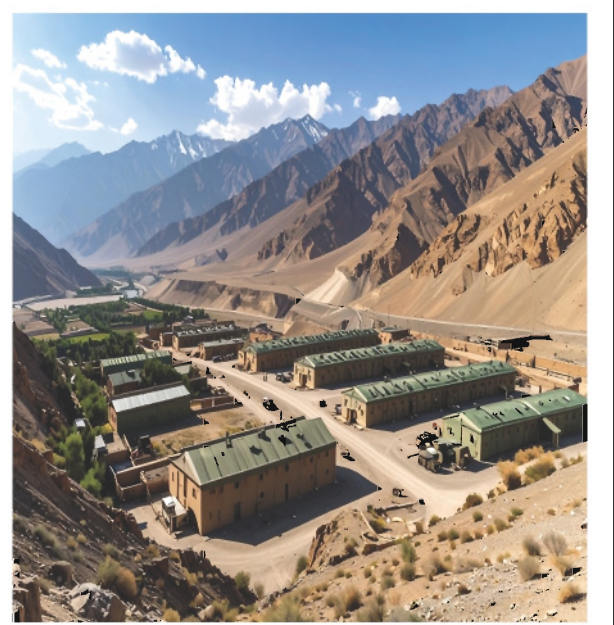
The Taliban has begun building a special military base in the mountains of Kandahar's 11th district. The order reportedly comes directly from the group's leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, who has rarely been seen in public but is steadily working to tighten his control.

According to local sources, the base is being built in a remote, rocky area. It is designed not only as a defensive position but also as a command center for senior Taliban commanders and their forces. Underground tunnels are also being dug, creating hidden routes and storage facilities away from public view and in some cases, even away from Taliban police in the city.

Observers believe this project is part of Haibatullah's wider effort to consolidate power inside the Taliban. Reports of internal divisions have grown in recent months, and the construction of a secret fortress suggests the leader is preparing to secure himself against both external threats and internal rivals.

The Taliban has made no official statement about the base. But the secrecy surrounding it, the tunnels, and the choice of location in Kandahar and the group's historical stronghold make it clear that this is more than a simple military outpost.

It is a fortress of control, built quietly in the mountains, raising questions about how long the Taliban can rule from shadows instead of open governance.



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