



Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies



Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies

Opinions and Trends

53/26

Neighbourhood Insights Series

January 2026

Terror Sanctuaries Next Door

Dr. Tehmina Aslam Ranjha | 13 January 2026

“Pakistan justifies the strikes by saying that the strikes are launched against its citizens who have taken refuge in the border areas of Afghanistan. In this inclination, the danger lies with both the possibility of confrontation with Afghanistan and the likelihood of further volatility in KPK.”

Read More: <https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Jan-2026/terror-sanctuaries-next-door>

Regional Realignments: Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghan Factor

Dr Shazia Anwer Cheema | 27 January 2026

“By drawing upon the shared past, Pakistan and Uzbekistan can craft a forward-looking partnership that offers a guiding framework for regional stability, economic integration and collective security, rooted in historical relativity yet oriented towards future regional transformation.”

Read More: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2589204/regional-realignments-pakistan-uzbekistan-and-afghan-factor>

If Pakistan Weakens, The Region Pays

Sahibzaba Muhammad Usman | 28 January 2026

“Afghanistan where different warlike costumes can recruit, train, raise funds and even plot even with a considerably lower pressure than before and the neighbours are the recipients. Pakistan is almost in one thing; Pakistan is not in its path.”

Read More: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/28012026-if-pakistan-weakens-the-region-pays-oped/>

Solving Pakistan

Khurram Husain | 08 January 2026

“The ambition to solve Pakistan’s problems should remain confined to a narrow pragmatic corridor. And this would be my advice to those running the country: focus on a few things that can be done, where success carries the promise of cascading change, where known metrics for success can be developed.”

Read More: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1965743/solving-pakistan>

Pakistan’s Crypto Gap

Mohsin Saleem Ullah | 22 January 2026

“For millions of Pakistanis, cryptocurrency is no longer a novelty or a speculative gamble. It has become a coping mechanism. As inflation rises, the rupee weakens and moving money across borders grows harder, digital assets have stepped in where traditional finance often falls short.”

Read More: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2588326/pakistans-crypto-gap>

Civil Service vs Academic Leadership Models

Dr Muhammad Bilal Tahir | 23 January 2026

“Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has positioned her administration around a model of governance that is data-driven, citizen-focused, and explicitly designed to move beyond traditional cycles of crisis management. Her emphasis on institutional modernisation, digital oversight, and accountability is reshaping provincial machinery across multiple sectors.”

Read More: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2026/01/23/civil-service-vs-academic-leadership-models/>

Politics and the IMF

Atif Mehmood | 24 January 2026

“It’s no surprise Pakistan wants out of this cycle, but that’s going to take more than quick fixes. The tax-to-GDP ratio is still one of the lowest in the region, so there’s not enough cash for development or helping those who need it most. The energy sector keeps losing money, and state companies are bleeding millions.”

Read More: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2588699/politics-and-the-imf>

Maryam Nawaz Sharif’s Punjab Model

Azma Zahid Bokhari | 24 January 2026

“The Punjab Government has pursued a governance model that places technology, transparency, and service delivery at the centre of public administration. Rather than relying on ad hoc initiatives, the focus has been on structural reform—particularly through the integration of digital systems across government departments.”

Read More: <https://www.nation.com.pk/24-Jan-2026/maryam-nawaz-sharif-s-punjab-model>

Starring Roles

Arifa Noor | 27 January 2026

“Afridi, is focusing on the people; he doesn’t have the contacts to try and carry out negotiations. Be that as it may, it is still obvious that for a young politician and a relatively unknown one, he has a way with people. The ability to go out in the crowds and get them enthused is something that hasn’t been practised by many outside of the few leaders right at the top.”

Read More: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1969310/starring-roles>

Pakistan 2026: Restoring Trust Through Reform, Accountability, and Inclusion

Saad Hafiz | 27 January 2026

“Pakistan’s recent history offers a warning. Moments of apparent control or stability have often encouraged complacency among elites, followed by overreach and crisis. Public patience has worn thin. Citizens are less receptive to promises of future reform and more attentive to whether power is exercised fairly, predictably, and in their interest.”

Read More: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/27012026-pakistan-2026-restoring-trust-through-reform-accountability-and-inclusion-oped/>

Beyond Kinetics: Pakistan's Imperative Shift to Counterterrorism 2.0

Aamir Zulfiqar Khan | 30 January 2026

“Counterterrorism 2.0 needs to recognise that ideology is a primary battlefield. Thus, a well-thought-out strategy needs to be chalked out, focusing on empowering educators, moderate community and religious leaders, and, most importantly, the youth of Pakistan.”

Read More: <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/30-Jan-2026/beyond-kinetics-pakistan-s-imperative-shift-counterterrorism-2-0>

Snow, Militancy, and the Cost of Incompetence

Dr Zafar Khan Safdar | 31 January 2026

“Political rhetoric and street mobilization elsewhere only exacerbate the state's paralysis. Recent calls by senior political figures to disrupt critical infrastructure in KP, including cutting electricity from Tarbela Dam, reveal an alarming willingness to weaponize the province for partisan gain.”

Read More: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2026/01/31/snow-militancy-and-the-cost-of-incompetence/>

A Rare Opportunity

Ahmed Bilal Mehboob | 31 January 2026

“The provision of de facto extension in the tenures of the CEC and ECP members by allowing them to stay in their positions indefinitely under the 26th Amendment, runs counter to the original scheme. It is, therefore, much better to make fresh appointments in the ECP as soon as possible.”

Read More: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1970045/a-rare-opportunity>

Collateral Damage: The Humanitarian Consequences of Western Sanctions on Afghanistan

Dr Sara Moussavi | 20 January 2026

“The persistent neglect of humanitarian needs compounds vulnerabilities and perpetrates more extreme impoverishment, while sanctions continue to restrict financial transactions, access to aid, and the process of payments due to the asset freeze and exclusion from the global financial market, placing a further burden on the Afghan population.”

Read More: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2026/01/20/collateral-damage-humanitarian-consequences-western-sanctions-afghanistan>

The Contradictions of Taliban Governance

Asad Ali | 21 January 2026

“While the Taliban have consolidated power and imposed a form of order, this stability is brittle. It rests on coercion, ideological conformity and repression rather than inclusive governance or broad-based legitimacy. For Pakistan and the wider region, these internal dynamics carry serious implications.”

Read More: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2026/01/21/the-contradictions-of-taliban-governance/>

Ideology as a Tool for Gaining Power in Afghanistan

Mohammad Farhad Jalal | 12 January 2026

“In Afghanistan’s political experience, ideologies have rarely emerged from deep, organic intellectual and social transformations. Instead, they have largely taken shape in reaction to regional and global developments and in connection with the interests of external powers, and have been employed instrumentally.”

Read More: <https://8am.media/eng/ideology-as-a-tool-for-gaining-power-in-afghanistan/>

The Taliban’s Governance and Penal Codes: Repression and the Consolidation of Autocracy

Benazir Samim | 26 January 2026

“The Taliban’s governance and penal codes reveals that this is not a legal system but a law-like construct designed for organized repression and the consolidation of autocracy. The absence of popular legitimacy, the lack of a constitution, the suspension of fundamental human rights principles, and the instrumentalization of sharia have turned the Taliban’s codes into tools for structural violence and social control.”

Read More: <https://8am.media/eng/the-talibans-governance-and-penal-codes-repression-and-the-consolidation-of-autocracy/>

As the Taliban Continue Their War on Women and Girls, it is Clear that Appeasement has Failed

Gordon Brown | 29 January 2026

“While the Kabul faction acknowledges that the economy requires women’s participation and access to technology, Akhundzada has become increasingly determined to impose a strict Islamic emirate, isolated from the modern world, where religious figures loyal to him control every aspect of society.”

Read More: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/jan/29/taliban-afghanistan-women-girls-appeasement-gender-repression>

Taking to the Streets

Apurba Mogumder | 21 January 2026

“Bangladesh, whether it is quota systems, exam results, government department restructuring, or professional certifications, the pattern is the same: The government does not take the initiative to forestall discontent through proper communication, and protests become the default mode through which people get their voices heard.”

Read More: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/op-ed/401464/taking-to-the-streets>

How Energy Insecurity and Climate Vulnerability Converge in Bangladesh

Raida A.K. Reza | 26 January 2026

“Bangladesh suffers not only from a lack of energy access, but is also one of the world’s most climate-vulnerable nations. According to the World Bank, tropical cyclones already cost the country about \$1 billion every year. If sea levels rise by just 27 cm by 2050, the southern coast could lose nearly 18 percent of its farmland, plunging the country into a severe food crisis.”

Read More: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/how-energy-insecurity-and-climate-vulnerability-converge-bangladesh-4090331>

Jamaat’s Crisis Over Shariah and Islam

Zahed Ur Rahman | 27 January 2026

“If Jamaat or any other “Islamic” party declares its intention to establish Shariah, the question inevitably arises as to whether it retains the right to engage in politics under Bangladesh’s existing constitution. Conversely, if Jamaat insists it will not implement Shariah, then another question follows: by using the word “Islam” in its name, is it misleading the public?”

Read More: <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/op-ed/1oboqwtv62>

Election Stakes, Coalition Battles, and the Awami League Question

Zillur Rahman | 28 January 2026

“Bangladesh is heading into one of the most consequential elections in its history, not only because it follows the dramatic fall of Sheikh Hasina’s government but also because it marks a decisive break from a long-entrenched political order. The February 12 election, will be more than about choosing a new government; it will be about redrawing the country’s political map.”

Read More: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/election-stakes-coalition-battles-and-the-awami-league-question-4091996>

Self-Determination Under International Law: The Bangladesh Perspective

Dr Sreoshi Sinha | 29 January 2026

“The people of Bangladesh have been repeatedly deprived of their right to self-determination within the internal state system. The civil and political rights of a certain segment of the population of the state have been taken away, including being prevented from participating in elections to form a government.”

Read More: <https://www.news18.com/amp/opinion/opinion-self-determination-under-international-law-the-bangladesh-perspective-ws-l-9863320.html>

Cyclone Ditwah Tempers Sri Lanka's Post-Budget Optimism

Ganeshan Wignaraja | 03 January 2026

“Cyclone Ditwah means a riskier economic scenario for Sri Lanka in 2026 than the November 2025 budget envisaged. The 7 per cent growth target seems improbable with a devastated agriculture sector, damaged infrastructure, disrupted tea and garment exports, increased import needs and reconstruction costs. For debt-distressed economies like Sri Lanka, vulnerability to external shocks means that the road to recovery is precarious.”

Read More: <https://eastasiaforum.org/2026/01/03/cyclone-ditwah-tempers-sri-lankas-post-budget-optimism/>

Beyond Protest: Why Nonviolence is SL's Strategic Asset

Dr. Nadee Dissanayake | 18 January 2026

“Sri Lanka's recovery remains fragile. Economic indicators may improve, but trust takes longer to rebuild. Nonviolence is the bridge between reform and legitimacy, between recovery and resilience. The choice is not between order and chaos, or strength and softness. The real choice is between short-term control and long-term stability.”

Read More: <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/DjlepzIBzhtKJPJ0lodh>

A Strategic Roadmap to Sri Lanka's Economic Independence

Maj. Gen. Boniface Perera | 21 January 2026

“Economic independence for Sri Lanka is not a dream; it is a choice. While the JVP Government's first year has been marred by natural disasters and a steep learning curve, the path forward requires radical transparency, fiscal discipline, and a relentless focus on productivity.”

Read More: <https://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/A-strategic-roadmap-to-Sri-Lankas-economic-independence/172-330854>

Prevention of Terrorism Against the State Bill

Rohan Samarajiva | 29 January 2026

“Agreement in principle has been reached on a massive trade agreement between the major economic powerhouses of India and the EU. This is a major and positive element of the reconstitution of international economic relations following the depredations of Donald Trump. But it requires attention and action on Sri Lanka’s part.”

Read More: <https://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/Prevention-of-terrorism-against-the-State-Bill/172-331559>

The Digital Key to Political Stability: Government Must Adapt to the Technology

Bishu Giri and Indra Giri | 13 January 2026

“Nepal can learn from countries like Estonia, which has become a role-model country for digital transformation. Nepal's youth expect more from their government. Nepal has taken steps towards digitalisation, but the question is whether it is moving fast enough to meet citizens' expectations.”

Read More: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/the-digital-key-to-political-stability-government-must-adapt-to-the-technology>

Change Beyond the Ballot

Meghna Adhikari | 22 January 2026

“If the demands of the Gen Z movement are allowed to dissipate into factionalism, delay and co-optation, this moment will join a long list of revolutions remembered more for their promise than their outcome. The responsibility to change that fate now rests with us. This is not a moment to wait anxiously for election results.”

Read More: <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2026/01/22/change-beyond-the-ballot>

A Lamp Not Yet Lit: Nepal’s Energy Optimism

Ram C Acharya | 26 January 2026

“Nepal’s core challenge is not choosing between production and use, but breaking the low-level equilibrium that keeps both suppressed. Growth in electricity supply and growth in productive demand must advance together, each reinforcing the other. Without that coordination, neither exports nor incremental capacity additions can deliver transformation.”

Read More: <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/a-lamp-not-yet-lit-nepals-energy-optimism-59-29.html>

Central Asia–Japan Summit Signals Shift in Eurasian Geoeconomics – and Russia’s Waning Role

Anvar Nazirov | 29 January 2026

“Japan’s elevation of the Central Asia + Japan dialogue to a leaders-level summit represents more than a ceremonial milestone. It signals a new phase of geoeconomic competition and cooperation in which Central Asia is no longer merely a space of influence, but an active participant shaping its own future. For Russia, the challenge is existentially strategic rather than rhetorical.”

Read More: <https://timesca.com/opinion-central-asia-japan-summit-signals-shift-in-eurasian-geoeconomics-and-russias-waning-role/>

Building Trust in Kazakhstan’s Fast-Growing Fintech Ecosystem

Sayan Katrenov | 26 January 2026

“Kazakhstan’s digital finance sector has moved fast, and now trust will shape its next stage. By addressing data concentration risks early, the country can strengthen user confidence and avoid disruptions that could slow progress. The payoff is clear: continued growth built on a foundation of safety and transparency.”

Read More: <https://astanatimes.com/2026/01/building-trust-in-kazakhstans-fast-growing-fintech-ecosystem/>

Iran’s Rulers are Betting on the Iron Fist

Ata Mohamed Tabriz | 21 January 2026

“What is unfolding in Iran is therefore not a temporary crackdown. It is the outcome of a long shift from governing society to confronting it as an enemy. It is almost impossible to predict where Iran is headed, but its rulers appear to have bet on the iron fist—suspending politics for a permanent emergency and burning all bridges back to mediation and consent.”

Read More: <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202601219573>

‘Change is Inevitable’: What is Next for Iran?

Virginia Pietromarchi | 24 January 2026

“In the shadow of the apparent calm, the very same grievances that sparked the unrest remain, leaving Iran with little choice but to make tough compromises to win sanctions relief and fix the economy or face further upheaval, experts say. With a battered economy, a weakened network of regional allies and the looming threat of a US attack, Iran is at a crossroads.”

Read More: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/24/change-is-inevitable-what-is-next-for-iran>

The “Security and Development” Dichotomy in Iran: Which Path has the Islamic Republic Chosen?

Kiomars Samadi | 24 January 2026

“One consequence of blending security-centrism with the Islamic Republic’s transnational and ideological mission has been the permanent securitization of Iran’s domestic space. In such an environment, street protests are not viewed as a legitimate and inherent right of citizens but are framed as an existential threat.”

Read More: <https://8am.media/eng/the-security-and-development-dichotomy-in-iran-which-path-has-the-islamic-republic-chosen/>

What Syria–Israel Talks Means for Turkiye

Dr. Sinem Cengiz | 16 January 2026

“Turkish-Israeli-Syrian relations have long had an important and complex dimension that helps explain the region’s dynamics. In the mid-1990s, Turkiye was concerned that a possible Syria-Israel peace agreement might come at its expense. Although the Syrian-Israeli negotiations focused on issues such as border demarcation, security arrangements, water resources and normalization of relations, they often generated serious anxiety in Turkiye.”

Read More: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2629551>

REGION IN PICTURES

Deputy National Security Advisor Pavan Kapoor visited Tehran on 28 January 2026 for consultations with his Iranian counterpart Dr. Ali Bagheri Kani, Deputy for International Affairs, SNSC.



Pic Credits: The Indian Express

Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with other leaders during a group photograph at the India-Arab Foreign Ministers' meeting, in New Delhi on 31 January 2026.



Pic Credits: The Economic Times

President Asif Ali Zardari met with Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa on 14 January 2026 in Manama, with the former reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to broadening cooperation between the two countries across political, economic, defence and cultural fields.



Pic Credits: Dawn

Top Taliban officials met Iran's Foreign Minister on 26 January 2025 to discuss tensions along their shared border, the treatment of Afghan refugees in Iran and water rights.



Pic Credits: The Hindu



Centre for Aerospace Power
and Strategic Studies

The Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies (CAPSS) is an independent, non-profit think tank that undertakes and promotes policy related research, study and discussion on defence and military issues, trends, and development in air power and space for civil and military purposes, as also related issues of national security. The Centre is headed by Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani (Retd).

Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies
P-284, Arjan Path, Subroto Park, New Delhi 110010
Tel: +91 11 25699130/32, Fax: +91 11 25682533

NOTE: **Regional Opinion and Trends** aims to capture prevailing opinions in South Asia and West Asia.

Editor: Dr Shalini Chawla e-mail: shaluchawla@yahoo.com

Compilation and Designing: Ms Priyadarshini Baruah and Mr Rohit Singh

The views expressed in this brief are those of the author and not necessarily of the Centre or any other organisation.