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AI-DRIVEN HYBRID WARFARE IN SOUTH ASIA: US POLICY OPTIONS AND PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC ROLE

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Abstract
The introduction of artificial intelligence in the military systems is a game changer in the South Asian strategic affairs, as it has completely changed the concept of deterrence stability and conflict escalation in the region. This paper discusses AI-based hybrid warfare as one of the aspects of critical threats in the region with special attention to strategic weaknesses and countermeasures of Pakistan. This study examines the impacts of machine-speed decision-making on compressing the traditional escalation ladders based on the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict and the US-Iran AI-powered military operations of early 2026 as it investigates qualitatively the recent developments in the field. The research questions discussed in the study are How does AI integration change the hybrid warfare capabilities in South Asia? What are the strategic weaknesses of AI-enabled conflict situations to Pakistan? What are the policy alternatives that the United States can use to encourage stability in the region and enhance technological cooperation with Pakistan? The results indicate that the measured nature of the AI militarization in Pakistan is based on the human-in-the-loop control and the capacity building at the local level which serves as a stabilizing response to the pressure in the region. The US policy choices can be institutionalization of crisis communication systems, facilitating the AI governance systems in Pakistan, and using the technological alliance to advance responsible AI use. The article ends with suggestions of the system of cooperative governance that will not only ensure the stability of the strategy but also will be able to capitalize on the use of AI in the security applications.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Hybrid Warfare, South Asia, US-Pakistan Relations, Strategic Stability, Deterrence's*

1. Introduction
The nature of war is experiencing a change that has never been witnessed since the nuclear weapons were invented. The concept of artificial intelligence is transforming the world military approach, marking beginning of technological dominance that goes far beyond the conventional views of military dominance. These changes are more than any other place in South Asia where two nuclear-armed rivals, India and Pakistan face each other on contentious borders with a history of frequent conflict. The incorporation of AI into military systems in the region creates additional complexities on unstable deterrence designs, compresses the time scale of decision making and blurs the distinction between the tactical interactions and the strategic escalation.

The world had gotten a glimpse of this new reality in May 2025, when India and Pakistan were involved in a multi-domain war which included AI-enabled targeting, electronic warfare technologies, and autonomous defense systems and networks. It was the first time in decades that the major cities and military installations were attacked with the help of artificial intelligence targeting, providing the viewers with a disturbing vision of how the war would be in the region. The war that eventually was held back revealed weaknesses that cannot be afforded by policymakers in Washington, Islamabad and New Delhi.

Even more urgency is attached to the present moment. A US-led military action against Iran, which is still going on at the time of this research, is proving that generative AI can do everything a kinetic operation can do. The Maven Smart System, which uses the Claude large language model of Anthropic, has reduced the targeting cycles down to weeks to hours, and can destroy about 1,000 targets in the first 24 hours of its operation. This step in capacity matters a lot to the South Asian strategic stability where the convergence of the AI-enables

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intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) with the high-speed targeting capabilities has the potential to destabilize the pre-existing deterrence systems.

The article explores the concept of AI integration, hybrid warfare, and strategic stability in South Asia in terms of the qualitative research approach based on the analysis of current cases and the evaluation of the policy. In particular, the research is aimed at identifying the strategic location of Pakistan, its shortcomings in the AI-supported conflict situations, and how the US-Pakistan alliance will help manage the stability in the region. This inquiry is informed by three research questions: First, what impacts is the integration of AI in changing the capabilities of hybrid warfare and the dynamics of escalation in South Asia? Second, what are the strategic weaknesses of Pakistan in conflict situations involving AI and what counter-measures has it come up with? Third, what are the policy alternatives that the United States has to ensure the regional stability and at the same time strengthen the technological relationship with Pakistan? The importance of this question goes beyond the academic interest. Regardless of whether AI capabilities are used deliberately or accidentally, the risk of unwanted escalation in South Asia increases in proportion. The strategic calculus of Pakistan, cooperation with the United States, and the policy instruments to cope with those risks is the key to preventing the future conflicts in Pakistan which may get out of control of people.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Revolution in Military Affairs and AI Integration

The theoretical framework for understanding AI's impact on warfare draws substantially from Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) literature. Scholars examining RMA have long argued that technological breakthroughs create discontinuous shifts in military effectiveness, fundamentally altering the balance of power. AI is such a breakthrough, but with unique features that are not similar to the past technological revolutions. In contrast to nuclear weapons, which established a stable situation with mutually assured destruction, AI systems bring about instability, namely, speed, opaqueness, and compression of decision-making processes.

Babar and Sarwar's comparative analysis of AI militarization in South Asia provides foundational insights into how India and Pakistan are adapting their military structures to integrate artificial intelligence. Their study shows a vast difference in their strategy: India has undertaken an active, tactical stance toward integrating AI, seeking capacities in various areas such as autonomous air defense systems, AI-enabled electronic warfare, and satellite-based ISR networks. The development of Pakistan, in its turn, seems to be more moderate and slow, dedicated to the national capacity building and the preservation of human control over deadly mechanisms.

This deviation has serious implications on the stability in the region. The authors believe that AI militarization without control would enhance instability and conflict potential in South Asia, and it is necessary to continue to cooperate and govern AI. Their discussion under RMA framework indicates the ways AI-based technologies are reorganizing asymmetric warfare potential, enhancing intelligence activities, and influencing the process of decision making within military systems.

2.2 AI and Escalation Dynamics in Nuclear Environments

The intersection of AI with nuclear deterrence has generated substantial scholarly attention. Research focusing on South Asian nuclear dynamics emphasizes how AI-enabled systems compress traditional escalation ladders. In past conflicts, escalation was expected to follow a broad but systematic process: detection of a crisis trigger, verification and attribution, political deliberation, and response execution. AI-enabled systems bypass these stages almost

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entirely, shifting decision-making from traditional human-led Observe-Orient-Decide-Act loops to faster, AI-driven Super OODA architectures.

This transformation carries particular risks in nuclear environments. Decision-making time compression minimizes the opportunities to use diplomacy and augmentation of the chances of successful retaliation against false positives or spoofed alerts before human leaders can intervene. Scholars warn that the haste to merge AI into command-and-control systems, battlefield surveillance, autonomous targeting, and decision support tools could shift battle decision-making toward goal-centric algorithms that prioritize achieving predefined objectives over exercising situational judgment or restraint .

This literature has given rise to the concept of a strategic state, which refers to an environment where all systems are interconnected at different domains, and therefore, allow AI-driven and more opaque goal-driven decision-making. When such an environment is involved, even such a minor action as jamming a radar or disruption of a satellite connection may have unforeseen side effects in other parts of the system, resulting in retaliation at machine speed and falling escalation ladders within a few seconds.

3.1 Capabilities of Hybrid Warfare and Asymmetric.

The literature on hybrid warfare focuses on the integration of the traditional and unconventional, taking advantage of the technological superiority to pursue the strategic goals without provoking the outburst of the war. Historically, proxy groups, information operations, and economic coercion have been the forms of the hybrid warfare in South Asia. The integration of AI changes these dynamics and makes more advanced types of influence operation, automated disinformation campaigns, and precision targeting possible that erases the line between combatants and civilians.

The study of the Digital Rights Foundation on the new technology in Pakistan indicates that AI is already being implemented in the hybrid warfare situations. Their work was founded on the focus group discussions with 79 people and survey answers of 60 people revealing that 63 percent of the participants were worried about disinformation whereas a half of them were concerned about monitoring facilitated by AI. The study reported real-life cases such as women who fell victim to AI-made deepfakes and AI-based disinformation that spurred sectarian violence in other parts of the world, such as Kurram.

These results highlight the susceptibility of the civilian populations to the use of AI-based hybrid warfare strategies. The ability to produce persuasive fake media, to computerize disinformation programs, and carry out accurate surveillance provides novel channels of coercion that do not necessarily reach the conventional level of armed conflict.

2.4 Pakistan's Strategic Culture and Technological Adaptation

The academic literature on the strategic culture of Pakistan highlights the fact that the nation has always been keen on ensuring credible minimum deterrence towards the Indian conventional superiority. Pakistan has developed an AI integration strategy based on asymmetric capabilities that will not result in an escalation despite aggression, which has been shaped by this strategic orientation. This approach is exemplified by creating the Centre of Artificial Intelligence and Computing of the Pakistan Air Force in 2020, which aims at automation of threat recognition, data fusion, and cognitive electronic-warfare systems and keeping humans in control.

Studies of digital transformation in Pakistan emphasize the twofold problem of Pakistan which is the use of AI to both develop the economy and govern the country and the security weaknesses. The National Artificial Intelligence Policy 2025, which is approved by the cabinet, has ambitious goals such as training one million individuals on skills related to AI, the creation of national Centers of Excellence, and the development of a specific National AI Fund. The

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development applications of AI can be seen in the early pilot projects to collect taxes via satellite imaging and monitor the environment via AI-based dashboards.

Nevertheless, researchers also report great gaps in governance. According to the investigation conducted by the Digital Rights Foundation, the National AI Policy 2025 of Pakistan is focused on the promotion of innovation and development without providing any enforceable rights protection measures that would restrict the activities of monitoring, censoring, algorithmic discrimination, and harms with the help of technologies. This leadership gap leaves gaps that can be exploited by those who are against the hybrid warfare.

2.5 US-Pakistan Strategic Partnership

The development of the US-Pakistan relations was characterized by intermittent cooperation with tensions between it. The modern literature has focused on the redefinition of this relationship not in terms of security-focused models, but in terms of wider interaction which includes trade, technology and development. The example of the visit of the deputy assistant secretary, John Mark Pommersheim, to Pakistan in February 2026, where the talks were mostly aimed at artificial intelligence collaboration, partnerships in the IT sector, and economic reforms instead of the traditional military aid.

Such recalibration is an expression of Pakistan being known to be strategically significant in the stability of South Asia. The US officials have been supportive of the economic reforms in Pakistan under its International Monetary Fund program with encouragement of policies that promote transparency and a friendly investment environment. The focus on AI and technology alliances is a prospective aspect of bilateral collaboration that recognizes that in the future, the strategic competition will be characterized by technological competencies as much as by traditional military strength.

3. Research Methodology

The research strategy utilized in this study is that of qualitative research, which is suitable in ambiguous geopolitical phenomena where contextual knowledge and interpretation hold the most important. Qualitative methods will help the researcher to examine the meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences, which constitute strategic behavior, with the insights being inaccessible to quantitative methods.

There are various qualitative strategies used in the research design. Case study analysis offers the in-depth analysis of the latest conflicts which shed light on AI role in South Asian security relationships such as the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict and the US-Iran military activities of early 2026. The analysis of documents is based on policy papers, official documents, and strategic plans in Pakistan, India, and the United States to determine the official standpoints and strategic priorities. The expertise interpretation is based on the interpretation of the strategic scholars, defense analysts, and policymakers through published research and media commentary.

The sources of data will be considered academic publications that have passed peer review, official governmental reports, policy briefs published by research institutions, and media coverage of the latest events. The literature review will cover materials published in the last 20 years, which is 2000-2026, as it will be relevant today but will not be out of context. Special focus is put on the sources of 2025 and 2026 which reflect the latest trends of AI implementation and South Asian security relations.

Three main questions guide the analysis and are the main focus of the research:

1. How is the hybrid warfare capability and escalation in the South African region receptive to the AI integration?
2. Which strategic vulnerabilities of Pakistan in the AI-enabled conflict environments are there, and what are the counter-measures that it developed?

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3. Which policy options can the United States adopt to promote stability in the area and improve technological cooperation with Pakistan?
4. These questions are thematically discussed and the results of other sources are generalized in order to make consistent conclusions and policy recommendations.

Question 1: What Is the Impact of AI Incorporation on Hybrid Warfare Authorities and Escalation Relationships in South Asia?

The introduction of the artificial intelligence into the military systems of South Asia is the primary change in the dynamics of security in the region. This transformation works in various mechanisms that provide overall transformation in the way conflicts start, build up, and end.

4.1 Compression of Decision-Making Cycles

The biggest effect of AI implementation is the reduction in the decision-making time on all stages of war. In conventional warfare, making a decision was determined according to what is referred to as OODA loop by the strategists; Observe, Orient, Decide, Act. This cycle gave room to verification, deliberation as well as diplomatic intervention between detection and response. AI-based systems overcome these steps and provide machine speed responses that are faster than human thought.

This compression was witnessed in the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict. In that clash, each party used artificial intelligence-based targeting systems, self-operating air defense systems, and cognitive electronic warfare. India also launched its Akashteer system which was reportedly an all-AI powered autonomous defense system that can identify and respond to airborne attacks without any human input. The Pakistani country used the CENTAIC developed threat recognition and data fusion systems to automatize the responses to the incoming threats.

The compression has far reaching implications to escalation control. When the systems have the potential to react to the perceived threats within a few seconds, the time span within which the human leaders will be able to verify the information, consult with allies, and discuss the escalation consequences becomes insignificant. An alert of spoofed missiles may result in retaliation before the political leaders can clearly comprehend what has taken place.

4.2 The blurring of tactical and strategic boundaries.

When AI is incorporated, there is a lack of clarity in differentiation between tactical and strategic actions. The escalation ladder concept in the conventional type of warfare gave a conceptual distance between the localized warfare and the strategic one. Tactical moves may be held back and the escalation process may be conducted in phases with chances of a de-escalation at every level.

The systems based on AI do not separate these. In accordance with the observation by Dixit, the Indian Chief of Integrated Defense Staff, the future wars will be won by the one who can finish the OODA loop quicker. This necessity to work fast leads to the combination of tactical and strategic functions. The satellite surveillance systems that were used in the past to serve different tactical and strategic purposes are now used to feed the same data streams to the real-time targeting as well as long-term plans to deterrence. Tactical electronic attack tools used in electronic warfare are also known to have the same impact on the strategic stability, which is the destruction of command-and-control capabilities of adversaries.

This operational entanglement becomes what analysts refer to as a strategic state, where all systems become entangled on domains, and AI-driven and more opaque goals-based decision-making becomes possible. Such environment causes a small scale tactical measure, such as jamming a radar system, to have strategic impacts, which in turn causes responses based on the perceived purpose, but not the actual purpose.

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4.3 Artificial Intelligence-Based Hybrid Warfare Capabilities.

The use of AI improves the hybrid warfare capacity in many aspects. To start with, AI facilitates more advanced information operations by creating content automatically, targeting influence campaigns to individuals and quickly adapting to counter-narratives. The study conducted by the Digital Rights Foundation records the immediate consequences of AI-generated deepfakes and disinformation on the Pakistani society, as 63 percent of the participants were worried about the disinformation and women were singled out by the AI-generated content.

Second, the AI increases accuracy targeting during the hybrid warfare situation. The Maven Smart System used in the US operations against Iran shows how the generative AI can generate target lists, assign coordinates, prioritize tasks, and provide post-strike evaluations in real-time . This has made it possible to destroy a certain target causing minimal collateral damage and this has blurred the line between military operations and targeted strikes.

Third, AI will make it possible to have autonomous systems, which are capable of functioning in denied environments. Swarms of drones, autonomous underwater vehicles and loitering munitions fitted with AI options can also provide continuous surveillance, attack missions that do not need constant human oversight. These systems generate new vectors of hybrid warfare which act beneath conventional levels of armed conflict and have the effect of coercion.

4.4 Implications of Nuclear Deterrence.

The shifting of warfare by means of AI implementation has certain threats to nuclear deterrence. The nuclear dyad of South Asia has traditionally been handled by the principles of credible minimum deterrence and the nuclear levels were well established in order to avoid the escalation. The systems with AI pose a threat to this stability by reducing the distance between the traditional conflict and the use of nuclear power.

The tightening of the decision-making processes will decrease the time within which the leaders will be able to differentiate between conventional and nuclear threats. A system of air defense that is run by AI and senses incoming missiles will not distinguish between standard and nuclear packages. The programmed response parameters of the system can be speed oriented and verification based on the false or ambiguous information which can lead to nuclear escalation.

Moreover, the integration of AI poses some new vulnerabilities to the nuclear command-and-control systems. Rival use of AI-based cyber operations may also have the effect of degrading or disrupting nuclear command structures, providing incentive to pre- delegate launch authority or to launch-on- warning postures with greater risk of accidents. Its risks are exacerbated by the lack of transparency of AI decision-making procedures because the opponents cannot be sure about how the automated systems will act when faced with unclear stimuli.

5. Research Question 2: What are the Strategic Weaknesses of Pakistan in AI-Driven Conflict Situations, and what are the Counter-Strategies that it has developed?The traditional military asymmetry between Pakistan and India and the need to have credible minimum deterrence is determinant of the strategic location of the country in South Asia. The introduction of AI integration poses new vulnerabilities that demand this strategic calculus as well as providing asymmetric response opportunity.

5.1 Structural Vulnerabilities

The largest vulnerability of AI-enabled conflict environment in Pakistan is in the asymmetry of the structure of AI capabilities of India and Pakistan. India has taken a proactive and proactive approach to AI militarization, and is developing capabilities in a variety of domains investing heavily and institutionalizing it. The AI integration in India includes AI-enabled e-warfare systems, autonomous air defense network, satellite-based IRS, and AI-assisted command architecture, which integrates air, space, and digital space.

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The situation of development in Pakistan, in its turn, appears to have been less radical and rapid. Although Pakistan has been investing in AI capabilities that are related to the defense sector, such as setting up CENTAIC and developing fighter aircrafts in-house, its general AI output is lower than that of India, which has a more all-encompassing program. This gap in capability poses weaknesses in the intelligence gathering, data processing and decision support that can be taken advantage by the adversaries.

A second weakness is associated with the reliance of Pakistan on other nations on commercial AI ecosystems. The US-Iran war has made the reliance on commercial AI ecosystems susceptible, the ethical protection offered by the private sector becomes ineffective as soon as a capability becomes mission-critical and states are allowed to enforce coercion or replacement around it. The fact that AI systems in Pakistan are dependent on the ones developed in other countries forms some dependencies that may be exploited or cut in cases of crisis.

The third weakness is related to the compaction of the strategic decision-making time. The nuclear policy of Pakistan is based on the uncertainties of the nuclear thresholds to prevent conventional attacks by India. Systems based on AI that minimise decision-making times decrease the ambiguity bandwidth, which may prompt more overt nuclear signalling that may heighten the risk of escalation.

5.2 Counter-Strategies

Pakistan has come up with various counter-measures in order to deal with these weaknesses. The topmost is the focus on the indigenous AI capacity building. In 2020, the Air Force of Pakistan created CENTAIC to work on automating the threat recognition, data fusion, and cognitive electronic-warfare systems. Although the formation of CENTAIC has raised issues in India of a possible Chinese participation, on the available information, its operations are more directed towards local development and training without any indication of a common system of operation and real time information connections with China.

The focus on the development of the indigenous population is associated with the Pakistani understanding that the sovereignty of AI capabilities is a key to the strategic autonomy. Pakistan, according to one commentator, has invested in AI-relevant defense-related aspects to guarantee sovereignty in intelligence analysis, predictive modeling and decision support, all of which are heavily under human-in-the-loop supervision. This focus on human control is what separates the Pakistan approach to that of the fully autonomous systems.

The second counter-measuring provision is keeping the lethal systems under human-in-the-loop control. The strategy of Pakistan focuses on the fact that even though generative AI can speed up the operations, it has biases and errors that complicate any meaningful human control in targeting the country. This position is in line with the overall attempts of Pakistan to influence the international standards protecting human control over the use of lethality and the preservation of humanitarian law.

The third counter-strategy is the asymmetric capabilities that will prevent the escalation without provoking the Indian aggression. The purchase of Chinese J-35 stealth aircraft, HQ-19 surface-to-air missile, and KJ-500 airborne early warning and control aircraft indicates that Pakistan tries to reduce the qualitative disparities with India. These systems are designed to increase the price of any limited or preemptive attack which enhances conventional deterrence by denial.

5.3 Governance and Regulatory Frameworks.

Another way in which Pakistan has gone to manage the security implications of AI is the development of governance structures to deal with it. The National Artificial Intelligence Policy 2025 endorsed by the cabinet has high goals of developing AI and has put in place institutional frameworks to manage AI development . The policy is intended to educate one

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million individuals in the fields of AI, create national Centres of Excellence, and a special National AI Fund.

Nevertheless, there are still a lot of gaps in governance. According to the research of the Digital Rights Foundation, the AI policy in Pakistan does not have enforced rights protection measures, thus making it possible to monitor, censor, and be biased with algorithms and to harm with technology to thrive freely. These loopholes in governance present weak points that can be used against the adversaries during the hybrid war situations especially through information operations that attack the Pakistani society.

The Pakistani policymakers have realized the existence of these vulnerabilities and are therefore in the process of increasing regulatory measures. The mandatory implementation of all the information technology and cryptographic systems in the public and the private sector is required by the Pakistan Security Standards, and full compliance will have to be achieved by June 1, 2028. The Technology Risk Management frameworks by the State Bank of Pakistan currently require evidenced technical and governance controls, formal and board level supervision of cyber risk, and incorporation of cyber resilience into the general operational resiliency planning .

Question 3: What Policy Alternatives Does the United States Have to encourage Regional Stability and strengthen Technological Collaboration with Pakistan?

The US has several critical interests in the stability of South Asia such as the prevention of nuclear war between India and Pakistan, the countering of terrorism and their access to the markets in the Southern part of Asia. The incorporation of AI comes with new problems to these interests but also promises opportunities of positive US involvement.

6.1 Current US-Pakistan Engagement

The recent US-Pakistan interaction is an indication of a re-balancing of the bilateral relations towards wider cooperation including technology, economic growth and stability in the region. An example of this is the visit of the February 2026 of the Deputy Assistant Secretary, John Mark Pommersheim, to Pakistan. Meetings between Pommersheim and the leaders of the civilian and military forces of Pakistan dealt with the security of the region, collaboration in the defense and the development of the IT sector and the reforms of the economy.

One of the main events of the visit was the fact that Pommersheim was invited to the Indus AI Week in Pakistan, where he participated and voiced his firm belief in the further development of US-Pakistan collaboration both in IT and digital domains. The involvement is an indication that US has realized that bilateral relations can be established on a sustainable basis by technological collaboration as opposed to the traditional security assistance models that have proved unsustainable.

The US delegation focused on the establishment of a level playing field to the American firms and promotion of the policies to favor the growth of the American economy through the private sector and open investment environment. This economic and technological cooperation is in line with the overall US strategy of enhanced involvement with Pakistan on matters of interest.

6.2 Policy Alternative 1: Making Crisis Communication Mechanisms Institutional.

Institutionalisation of the effective crisis communication systems between India and Pakistan should be the top US policy priority. The May 2025 war revealed that the current channels are not sufficient in dealing with AI-enabled escalation. The shortening of the decision-making cycles during that confrontation minimized the possibility of a diplomatic intervention, and automated systems worked on the schedule faster than the human communication.

The United States has the prospects of using its relationship with the two nations to enhance the infrastructure of crisis communication. Certain solutions may involve enhancements of the Director General of Military Operations hotline to a 24/7 secure voice-data connection with the air force operations rooms to make flight deconfliction real-time. The United States might also

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

enable systems of sharing uncooked spectrum logs in 12 hours of disputed jamming or spoofing incidents, to allow technical validation that may avoid misunderstanding of vague incidences. These mechanisms ought to be formalised in the form of agreements instead of informal understanding which may crumble at the time of crisis. The United States can act as a guarantor of these arrangements, that offers technical support and checking capacities and creates trust in their dependability.

6.3 Policy Option 2: Supporting Pakistan's AI Governance Frameworks

The second policy alternative is to aid in the establishment of good AI governance systems in Pakistan. The National AI Policy 2025 of Pakistan is a starting point but there are still massive gaps in the enactment of enforceable protection of rights and security. According to the research of the Digital Rights Foundation, all AI deployments should undergo mandatory human rights impact assessment, long-stagnant data protection legislature should be passed, clear content moderation systems should be established, and participatory AI oversight organizations must exist.

United States is able to contribute such governance initiatives by providing technical support, capacity building as well as diplomatic participation. The US experience in AI regulation that is formed in the domestic regulatory activities and international relations may guide the creation of frameworks that are relevant to the situation in Pakistan. The resources needed in building capacity to governance can be provided by the US International Development Finance Corporation and other agencies in addition to technology development.

More to the point, US aid must not interfere with Pakistani sovereignty and impose geo-political models that do not necessarily apply locally. Digital Rights Foundation points out that Pakistan should be governed by the periphery, based on the journalists who are censored, women who are deepfaked, and workers who are automated. The US aid must be consistent with this people-centered policy instead of advancing techno-solutionist models that do not assume rights and accountability.

6.4 Policy Alternative 3: Encouraging Responsible AI Use by Technology Collaboration.

The third policy alternative is to use the US-Pakistan technology collaboration to facilitate responsible AI usage in military and security services. The US-Iran confrontation brought to the fore the clash between commercial AI ethics and military needs as Anthropic insisted on restrictions over the use of AI as lethal weapons in full autonomy, whereas the Pentagon insisted on the need to provide the freedom to operate without restrictions. All these tensions will keep on increasing as AI capabilities continue to spread.

The United States and Pakistan have interests in constructing the norms of responsible use of AI in the military. The two nations have indicated their willingness to have lethal systems controlled by human beings and adhered to the international humanitarian law. Such norms might be developed and promoted in joint initiatives such as bilateral statements of principles, joint research of AI safety and reliability, and multilateral initiatives such as forums such as the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. Technology partnership provides tangible processes of encouraging responsible utilization. The US firms that collaborate with Pakistani organizations have the opportunity to introduce ethical protection in transferred technologies, and this will set precedents of responsible usage. Human oversight and accountability as well as technical proficiency can be highlighted in joint training programs. Such alliances will help to show that thoughtful use of AI can be used together with strategic efficiency.

6.5 Policy Alternative 4: Reinforcing Regional Diplomatic Engagement.

The fourth policy alternative is the US enhancing of its diplomatic presence in the South Asian security matters, where AI integration could be the center of discussion in the region. The United States is able to hold track 1.5 and track 2 discussions that assemble Indian, Pakistani,

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and US authorities and specialists to establish mutual knowledge of the threats of AI and possible confidence-building actions.

These discussions must touch on certain technical problems where collaborations have the potential of producing a win-win situation. Some of the possible areas of discussion are creating notification rules in the case of AI-controlled military drills, creating technical standards that minimize the risks of misinterpretation of AI systems, and exchanging best practices in the field of human control over automated systems. This should be a gradual advancement on issues that can be handled at any given time which will help in generating confidence towards wider collaboration.

The United States ought to also involve China on the issues of AI governance that concerns South Asia. The fact that China is a major supplier of AI-relevant technologies to Pakistan is another move that adds more complexity to the situation which multilateral engagement could resolve. Although the strategic competition between the US and China limits their cooperation, there are mutual interests between both nations to avert the situation of unwanted escalation in South Asia that may lead to the US and China engaging in a conflict.

7. Key Findings and Recommendations

This discussion brings out various important conclusions that guide the policy recommendations of US involvement with Pakistan over the AI-driven hybrid warfare issues.

7.1 Key Findings

To begin with, the introduction of AI fundamentally changes the South Asian security dynamics by shortening the decision-making process and erasing the tactical and strategic boundaries, as well as allowing new strategies of hybrid warfare. The India-Pakistan conflict in May 2025 and the US-Iran activities in early 2026 indicate the fact that these changes are already a reality rather than on paper.

Second, structural asymmetry between the AI capabilities of India and Pakistan, reliance on external AI ecosystems, and time squeeze in strategic decision-making are major weaknesses to Pakistan. Nevertheless, the focus on indigenous capacity building, human in the loop control and asymmetric capabilities by Pakistan offers the counter-strategy that can ensure stability of deterrence.

Third, the US-Pakistan interaction has focused back on technological and economic collaboration, which presents a possibility of dealing with the issue of AI governance. The Pommersheim visit of February 2026 was the example of this strategy, with the focus on the cooperation with AI, development of IT sector, and economic changes.

Fourth, there are much-needed gaps in governance in the AI structure of Pakistan, especially on protection of rights and accountability measures. A research conducted by the Digital Rights Foundation records that there is general worry on privacy, disinformation, and surveillance that can be used by enemies in cases of hybrid warfare.

7.2 Recommendations

On the basis of these findings, the following recommendations can be suggested to the US policymakers:

Institutionalize Crisis Communication: The United States ought to give top priority to institutionalizing formidable communications of crisis between India and Pakistan including enhanced military hotlines, technical verification and real time deconfliction channel.. These mechanisms must be institutionalized by signing the formal agreements with the support of the US verification.

Enhance AI Governance Capacity: The US aid should help Pakistan build holistic AI governance systems, such as the law on data protection, the effects of AI on human rights, and

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Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

participatory control systems.. The assistance must be in accordance with the Pakistani sovereignty and in line with the people-centered methods of governance.

Encourage Responsible AI Usage: US-Pakistan technology partnership must include express commitments to responsible AI usage, such as human control of lethal systems, international humanitarian law, and ethical protection in transmitted technologies.. The military AI applications should have norms developed and propagated through joint efforts.

Increase Regional Engagement: The United States needs to enhance diplomatic involvement on South Asian security, and AI integration can serve as the topic of the conversation.. In track 1.5 and track 2 dialogues, certain technical problems concerning which collaboration can lead to mutual benefits, should be discussed.

Close Governance Loopholes: The US involvement must be sensitive to governance loopholes in the AI system in Pakistan and enable the civil society to record the rights implications and push towards accountability.. Such assistance must be in line with the greater US interests in democratic governance and human rights.

8. Conclusion

The use of artificial intelligence in the South Asian military systems can be considered a landmark event in the history of South Asian security. The systems based on AI reduce the time required to make decisions, blur tactical and strategic lines, and introduce novel vulnerabilities in deterrence systems that have stood the test of time. The India-Pakistan conflict that is expected in May 2025, and the current US-Iran one prove that such changes are already in action, and the policy response is urgently needed.

The strategic weaknesses of Pakistan in this new setting are determined by structural vulnerabilities as well as the counter-strategies of the country, which take the indigenous capacity, human control, and asymmetric capabilities into consideration. The United States with recalibrated involvement based on technology partnership and economic cooperation is capable of assisting Pakistan in its struggles to handle these difficulties coupled with encouraging regional stability.

The way forward involves the process of institutionalizing crisis communication systems, fostering effective AI governance systems, encouraging responsible AI practices by engaging in partnership, and enhancing regional diplomatic presence. These actions will not be able to exclude the dangers of AI-driven hybrid warfare but will help minimize the threat of unintentional escalation and create a basis of cooperative governance.

Due to the current growth in AI capabilities, it is becoming harder to have effective governance structures that can be established. The policies that policymakers in Washington, Islamabad, and New Delhi will make in the next few months will determine the future of South Asian security in decades to come. This study proposes that the US Pakistan alliance based on the mutual interest in stability and responsible use of technology opens the most promising way to address the threats of AI and use the opportunities of the new technology to improve the security and development.

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