

PAKISTAN DEFENCE AND MILITARY

WIDE ANALYSIS REPORT – 2026

Executive Assessment

Pakistan's defence system is shaped by conventional deterrence, nuclear deterrence, counterterrorism, border security, maritime interests, air and missile defence, and strategic partnerships. The armed forces comprise the Pakistan Army, Pakistan Air Force and Pakistan Navy, supported by the Ministry of Defence and a wider defence-administration ecosystem.

The 2026 security environment is demanding. Pakistan must manage pressures on its eastern and western borders, terrorism and militancy, maritime security, rapid technological change and a competitive regional balance, while fiscal constraints make defence modernisation inseparable from economic sustainability.

Principal themes

- Institutional structure and the evolving higher-command architecture.
- Roles and capabilities of the Army, Air Force and Navy.
- Nuclear deterrence and strategic stability at a high policy level.
- Counterterrorism, border security and internal threats.
- Defence industry, research, technology and international partnerships.
- Defence expenditure, economic trade-offs and governance.
- Future priorities: jointness, unmanned systems, cyber, electronic warfare, air defence and maritime awareness.

This report is a strategic and policy overview. It avoids sensitive tactical, targeting, force-deployment and weapons-employment details.

1. DEFENCE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

The Ministry of Defence is the principal civilian ministry responsible for defence policy, administration and coordination relating to the armed forces. Pakistan's official budget framework defines the defence goal as protecting national sovereignty and territorial integrity and national interests and assets through military means.

Higher command and jointness

A major development in 2026 has been the restructuring of higher military command. Constitutional and legislative changes created a Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) position and altered the previous joint-command arrangement. Recent reporting describes the CDF as providing unified operational direction across the Army, Navy and Air Force. The long-term effect on civilian oversight, service balance and institutional checks will depend on implementation.

Core functions

- Defence policy formulation and coordination.
- Administration and support of the armed forces.
- Defence budgeting and resource allocation.
- Inter-service coordination and military diplomacy.
- Border management and support to civil authorities during emergencies.
- Research, development, education and technical capacity.
- International peacekeeping and security cooperation.

The reform is therefore more than a change in titles: it is an attempt to create a more integrated military decision-making architecture. The key institutional question is whether greater operational unity can coexist with effective civilian direction, professional service responsibilities and accountability.

2. PAKISTAN ARMY

The Pakistan Army is the country's largest military service and has historically been central to national defence because of Pakistan's land borders with India, Afghanistan and Iran. Its responsibilities extend from conventional land defence to border security, counterterrorism, civil support and disaster response.

Major strategic roles

- Eastern deterrence: maintaining conventional readiness in the India–Pakistan security competition.
- Western border security: responding to militant activity and border-management challenges.
- Counterterrorism: intelligence-led security operations against militant organisations.
- Internal support: assistance to civilian authorities under the applicable legal framework.
- Peacekeeping: contributions to United Nations peacekeeping and other international commitments.
- Disaster response: relief and logistics during floods, earthquakes and other emergencies.

Operational environment

The Army's environment is increasingly multidimensional. Conventional competition remains important, but terrorism, drones, information operations, border infiltration and cyber risks also affect planning. This creates pressure to combine traditional land capabilities with intelligence, surveillance, communications, unmanned systems and rapid-response capacity.

A central challenge is balancing readiness for a high-intensity conventional crisis with persistent counterterrorism and border-security requirements.

3. PAKISTAN AIR FORCE

The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) is a central component of Pakistan's deterrence posture. Its responsibilities include air sovereignty, air defence, combat aviation, surveillance, transport and support to joint operations.

Modernisation priorities

- Modern combat-aircraft fleets and associated training and maintenance.
- Integrated air-surveillance and command-and-control systems.
- Early-warning and situational-awareness capabilities.
- Unmanned aerial systems and counter-unmanned-aircraft capabilities.
- Electronic warfare and secure communications.
- Networked operations linking air, land and maritime sensors.

Air warfare is shifting from platform quality alone toward systems integration. Sensors, data links, electronic warfare, unmanned aircraft, air defence and decision-support systems increasingly determine effectiveness.

For Pakistan, early warning and rapid air-response capabilities have particular strategic value. The future challenge is maintaining technological relevance without creating excessive fiscal or supplier dependence.

4. PAKISTAN NAVY AND MARITIME SECURITY

Pakistan's maritime interests are linked to the Arabian Sea, ports, trade routes, offshore resources and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. The Navy therefore contributes to military deterrence as well as maritime awareness and economic security.

Core responsibilities

- Protection of maritime approaches and national maritime interests.
- Naval deterrence and appropriate sea-control/sea-denial capabilities.
- Maritime surveillance and situational awareness.
- Protection of ports, infrastructure and important sea lines of communication.
- Multinational exercises and maritime-security cooperation.
- Support to wider national maritime-security institutions.

Modernisation and maritime economics

Port activity, commercial shipping, energy imports and regional connectivity depend on secure maritime routes. Investment in surveillance, patrol capacity, communications, logistics and coastal infrastructure therefore serves both defence and economic policy.

Pakistan's FY2025–26 performance budget includes funding for the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency and border mapping, illustrating the wider institutional nature of territorial and maritime security.

5. NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND STRATEGIC SECURITY

Nuclear deterrence is a defining feature of Pakistan's national-security posture. At policy level, its purpose is to reduce the likelihood that a major conventional conflict escalates into an existential threat. Nuclear capability consequently affects military planning, crisis diplomacy and India–Pakistan strategic calculations.

Strategic priorities

- Maintain credible deterrence while avoiding unnecessary escalation.
- Ensure secure command, control and institutional continuity.
- Protect strategic assets against accidents, unauthorised access and external threats.
- Maintain communication and crisis-management mechanisms.
- Keep strategic doctrine consistent with national security objectives and international obligations.

The 2026 higher-command reforms also affect institutional arrangements around strategic forces. Public analysis should focus on governance, command responsibility, crisis stability and risk reduction rather than operational details.

Strategic stability with India

The India–Pakistan relationship remains the most important external factor in Pakistan's strategic planning. Preserving deterrence while maintaining channels that reduce miscalculation is therefore a central policy objective. Political diplomacy, communication and restraint remain important alongside military capability.

6. COUNTERTERRORISM, BORDER SECURITY AND INTERNAL THREATS

Pakistan's military and security institutions continue to operate in an environment where terrorism and militant violence are major national-security concerns. The northwestern border with Afghanistan is particularly important because militant movements, border management and bilateral tensions interact with domestic security.

Key threat categories

- Militant violence associated with TTP and related networks.
- Separatist militancy and security challenges in Balochistan.
- Cross-border infiltration and border-management problems.
- Attacks against civilians, security personnel and economic infrastructure.
- Potential use of drones, digital networks and information operations.

Recent September 2026 reporting describes Pakistani security operations against militants attempting to cross from Afghanistan and continuing border tensions, showing that counterterrorism remains an active military requirement.

Comprehensive response

Military operations alone cannot eliminate the structural causes of insecurity. Sustainable stability requires intelligence cooperation, policing, border management, economic opportunity, education, local governance and credible legal institutions.

7. DEFENCE INDUSTRY, TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Pakistan's defence sector combines domestic production and research with international procurement and technology partnerships. The strategic objective is increasingly to build domestic capacity in maintenance, electronics, software, unmanned systems, aerospace and other high-value technologies.

Technology priorities

- Unmanned and autonomous systems.
- Counter-drone technologies.
- Cyber defence and secure communications.
- Electronic warfare and spectrum awareness.
- Artificial intelligence and decision-support systems.
- Aerospace research and advanced manufacturing.
- Integrated sensors, command-and-control and data networks.

Strategic partnerships

China remains a major defence partner, while relations with Türkiye and Gulf states are increasingly important. In August 2026, Pakistan, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia advanced a trilateral defence-cooperation framework under the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, including a secretariat arrangement. This signals broader defence diplomacy and cooperation in training, interoperability and technology.

The opportunity is to convert cooperation into domestic technological and industrial capability. The risk is excessive dependence on any single supplier. A resilient strategy should emphasise local skills, research, components, maintenance and export competitiveness.

8. DEFENCE BUDGET, ECONOMICS AND GOVERNANCE

Defence capability must be considered alongside Pakistan's fiscal position. The federal FY2025–26 budget allocated Rs 2.55 trillion to Defence Affairs & Services. The Medium Term Performance Based Budget also lists allocations for maritime security, border mapping, cantonment education, defence administration and selected research and development.

Economic trade-offs

- Defence spending supports deterrence, employment, infrastructure and security capacity.
- High defence expenditure can constrain fiscal space when debt servicing and other essential spending are elevated.
- Modernisation requires long-term capital planning rather than short-term crisis procurement.
- Domestic research and production can reduce foreign-exchange exposure and create industrial spillovers.
- Transparent budgeting and performance objectives improve resource efficiency.

Civil-military governance

Pakistan's military has historically had an unusually important role in national political and security affairs. The 2026 restructuring increases the importance of clearly defined civilian authority, parliamentary scrutiny, legal accountability and institutional checks.

The governance objective should be balance: military institutions need the authority and resources to perform security functions, while elected civilian institutions retain clear responsibility for national policy, budgets and strategic direction.

9. FUTURE OUTLOOK AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Pakistan's defence environment is likely to become more technologically intensive and complex. Future effectiveness will depend increasingly on integrating people, sensors, data, communications, unmanned systems and decision-making across all three services.

Priority areas for 2026–2035

- Jointness: make the new higher-command structure produce genuine interoperability.
- Air and missile defence: improve early warning, layered protection and resilient networks.
- Unmanned systems: develop operational and counter-drone capabilities.
- Cyber and electronic warfare: protect networks and build national expertise.
- Maritime security: expand coastal surveillance and protect economically important sea routes.
- Defence industry: move toward research, components, software and advanced manufacturing.
- Human capital: strengthen engineering, data science, cybersecurity and aerospace education.
- Counterterrorism: combine security operations with border management, policing and development.
- Strategic stability: maintain deterrence while improving crisis communication and escalation control.
- Governance: strengthen civilian oversight, legal clarity, budget discipline and accountability.

Conclusion

Pakistan possesses a large and experienced defence establishment with conventional, strategic and counterterrorism responsibilities. Its strengths include institutional depth, military experience, strategic deterrence and a growing network of defence partnerships. Its constraints include fiscal pressure, technological dependence, persistent militant threats and the challenge of balancing military effectiveness with strong civilian governance.

The next phase should focus on quality, integration and sustainability: stronger joint operations, advanced technology, domestic research, maritime awareness, counterterrorism capacity and disciplined long-term investment. The most durable security model is one in which military strength is matched by economic resilience, capable civilian institutions and a stable regional diplomatic strategy.

Sources used for the analysis include Pakistan's official FY2025–26 budget documents and recent public reporting on the 2026 defence-command reforms and international defence cooperation.