



Pakistan Is Not Building an ICBM to Attack America

By

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Misperceptions are circulating that Pakistan is an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) threat to the United States despite the fact that none of its missiles have a range beyond 2,750 kilometers (km)—the distance needed to cover India. There is no credible official or open-source intelligence that explains why Pakistan would seek to build an ICBM to attack the US. One thing is clear: Pakistan's nuclear capability is solely focused on India. Claims to the contrary misrepresent Pakistan's doctrinal posture while creating unfounded geostrategic fears.

Unlike North Korea or Russia, Pakistan's nuclear doctrine is India-focused and regionally confined. Even when it became a nuclear power, it was not the first country to introduce nuclear weapons in South Asia. Pakistan's missile inventory includes the Shaheen, Ghauri, Ababeel, and other series of missiles. They are all short- or medium-range missile systems to counter Indian nuclear capabilities. Even Pakistan's multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV)–capable medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM), the Ababeel, has a range of 2,200 km and is a response to India's ballistic missile defense system.

Moreover, Pakistan's Shaheen III land-based MRBM has a range of 2,750 to cover Indian far-off strategic bases in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. These missile ranges are not even close to the ICBM threshold of at least 5,500 km.

Unlike nuclear weapon states that have ICBMs, Pakistan does not possess the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capability, terrestrial or space-based, needed to accurately launch nuclear weapons half-way across the planet. India, not Pakistan, is working on not just ICBMs, but also the global ISR infrastructure to effectively employ such weapons. India has not only tested the Agni-V, which has a range of 8,000+ km but is also developing the Agni-VI with a 12,000 km range. The K-5 submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM), with intercontinental strike capability, is also in development.

It is alarming to note that the deployment of K-5 SLBMs on expansive ocean patrols can enable India to target Europe, Russia, Israel, and American Pacific territories. Such Indian military and nuclear buildup are not consistent with India's policy of credible minimum deterrence (CMD).

Currently, India is accelerating the deployment of 52 military satellites for ISR. These satellites will support ICBM employment and anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons capabilities.

Indian naval nuclear projection also indicates that it will develop military bases abroad in accord with its ambitions to be a blue-water navy. India is developing overseas military facilities across the Indian Ocean region, including in the Seychelles, Tajikistan, Oman, the Maldives, and Mauritius. India also has signed logistic support agreements (LSAs) with states for mutual logistic support at ports and bases. These agreements also include ISR agreements with Australia, France, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, the United Kingdom, the US, and Vietnam.

Pakistan's strategic culture and historic interests reflect a deep concern with losing a conflict against India. This is because Pakistan does not have the geography that allows for a defense in depth against an attacking Indian Army. Thus, both conventional and nuclear forces are designed to deter and defeat that specific threat.



Pakistan's nuclear doctrine is defined by the logic of CMD. Its full-spectrum deterrence (FSD) posture also falls under CMD at all levels of threat, including tactical, operational, and strategic. The development of an ICBM is inconsistent with every aspect of Pakistani military thinking and action.

Pakistan already fields the capabilities needed to strike any target in India. Pakistan has no ambitions regarding global power projection. From a Pakistani perspective, building nuclear weapons for the sake of coercing or striking the United States only makes the relationship with the United States worse and invites American intervention in Pakistan.

When Vipin Narang and Pranay Vaddi, Indian Americans, [published](#) an article in *Foreign Affairs* in which they suggested Pakistan is building an ICBM whose target is the United States, they engaged in blatant information warfare. Their assertion is unfounded.

India's shift from deterrence-by-denial to a more aggressive nuclear posture, [including](#) deterrence by compellence and punishment, certainly has Pakistan concerned. This change is tolerated by the United States because India is seen as a counterweight to China in Asia.

It is important for Americans to learn a critical lesson from the 2020 China-India crisis; India is unlikely to [fight](#) with the US against China if a war comes. China is the second-largest trade partner of India after the US with [total](#) trade reaching \$127.7 billion in 2024–2025. There is ample reason for India to do what it has always done, play both sides.

Admittedly, Pakistan has a problem with terrorism and a difficult time effectively controlling terrorists operating from the Afghan border region, which grew worse when Pakistan partnered with the US to fight the War on Terror. Pakistan is now the [second](#) most negatively affected country when it comes to terrorism.

Over recent years, Islamabad alone lost 80,000 civilian and security personnel to the menace of terrorism. India has also been involved in terror activities in Pakistan, [irrefutable](#) evidence of Indian involvement was provided to UN Secretary-General.

Keep in mind, the vast majority of Pakistanis want to live in a country that looks like the United States, not one that looks like Afghanistan or China—when it comes to democracy, economic prosperity, freedom, and stability. Pakistanis want increased economic trade and development with the United States, not nuclear war.

As India expands its capabilities, Pakistan is likely to follow India's lead. This is, however, done for the purpose of ensuring India cannot launch a disarming strike against Pakistan. Platforms like SSBNs may be necessary as Pakistan is [compelled](#) to diversify, not globalize, its range of nuclear weapons.

If the US is sincere in its desire to create stability in South Asia, encouraging India to cease building nuclear weapons that are a direct threat to Pakistan would be helpful. The US can also invest in arms control dialogue and crisis communication in South Asia. President Trump played a key role in ending the most recent conflict. He also ended the Twelve Day War between Iran and Israel. Given his concern for preventing war, President Trump can play a critical role in South Asia.

Pakistan has partnered with the United States since its independence from India. It was a partner during the Cold War when India was not and worked closely with the United States for two decades during the conflict in Afghanistan. Admittedly, Pakistan faces some internal challenges, but educated Pakistanis want nothing more than a good relationship with the United States.



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