

## Stealth Alliance in South Asia: China–Pakistan Collaboration Reshaping Air Power and Regional Security

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**Abstract:** *The growing military partnership between China and Pakistan is bringing a major shift to air-power in South Asia. This study investigates how the arrival of J–35A fighter jets from China to Pakistan is changing the balance of power in the region, mainly compared to India’s air forces. With stealth technology, access to real-time information from space and new rockets, the Beijing and Islamabad countries protect their economic projects and counter India in the air. With qualitative content analysis of military statements, other geopolitical materials and expert opinions, this paper studies the impact of the alliance on operations, the economy and politics. According to the results, the stealth partnership goes further than only transferring weapons and represents a real strategy with consequences for regional security. Suggestions call on nearby countries to reconsider how they protect themselves and communicate more to guide the developing state of political power.*

**Keywords:** China–Pakistan Alliance, Stealth Technology, South Asia Air Power, J–35A fighter, Regional Security, Strategic Balance

### Introduction

Air power continues to play a major role in forming military and political strength in South Asia which faces many rivalries and tough security situations (Joshi & Malik, 2024). Historically, India has achieved air dominance through purchase of advanced, multirole aircraft such as the Dassault Rafale, compared to Pakistan’s practice of fielding legacy bands as well as aircraft locally produced in partnership (Ganguly & Kapur, 2023; IISS, 2024). Though, the new addition of Chinese J–35A stealth fighters in the Pakistan Air Force is bringing about major changes in this relationship. With early Chinese J–35A use by Pakistan, the PLAAF fifth-generation stealth warplane in trial service, Islamabad has startlingly enhanced its aerial defense and rearranged the strategic military balance of the region (IISS, 2024; Zhang, 2023). Through analysis of the J–35A’s features, this paper looks at the influence of China’s stealth alliance on the air force in India and how it supports the important China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Furthermore, the study examines the major implications of the growing connection between Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and how modern stealth weapons, along with timely satellite observations, are helping these countries shape regional influence independently of the West.

The study is divided into several areas: a collection of writings on South Asian air power, military alliances and China–Pakistan relations; a description of the research approach and data sources; a deep discussion on significant features of Pakistani stealth collaboration; a summary of outcomes and their influence on the region; and suggestions for regional policymakers to promote security.

### Literature Review

South Asia’s geopolitical environment has been shaped by a complex web of historical conflicts, enduring rivalries, rapid military modernization, and evolving strategic alliances. The region, primarily dominated by the India–Pakistan rivalry and the rising influence of China, presents a unique theater where air power assumes a critical role in national security, deterrence, and power projection. This review synthesizes key

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scholarship on military modernization in South Asia, China's emergence as a pivotal defense exporter, theoretical frameworks on alliances and power balancing, and the nascent integration of stealth technologies with space-based intelligence. It concludes by identifying existing research gaps and positioning this study's contribution.

### **Military Modernization in South Asia: India's Air Power Leap**

India's push to upgrade its air force is vital for keeping its leading position in South Asia. Kopp (2018) argues that India's Rafale aircraft paired with upgraded Su-30 fighters provide a major boost to its combat flying capability. Such airplanes bring together improved avionics, better weapons and a higher level of maneuverability, allowing India to conduct precise strikes, secure superiority in the air and fight more efficiently as part of a team. Kopp says India is modernizing its air forces because it wants to influence both neighbors and strengthen its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Between 2016 and 2022, the acquisition of Rafale fighters closed various capability gaps, particularly in hard-weather fighting, combat beyond what weapons can see and electronics warfare (Kopp, 2018). Singh (2021) goes on to mention India's steps to integrate its platforms with local command and control networks are important to increase awareness and response times during any operation. So despite making big improvements, Singh (2021) explains how aerial superiority could still be hampered by the slow procurement process, problems coordinating equipment and shortcomings in air force training. Even so, India is still focused on modern technology to keep ahead of Pakistan in military terms.

### **China's Emergence as a Global Defense Exporter**

At the same time as India opens up, China is playing a bigger role in selling military equipment and technologies to its allies worldwide. Ahmad (2020) reports that China has gone from shipping relatively few arms to now being able to export fifth-generation jets, missile systems and control systems for coordinating military action. The expansion includes China building its first stealth jet, the J-20, as well as the J-35A Gyr Falcon which is designed for international sales and has attracted notice for its leading technological features. According to Wang (2019), the J-35A is marketed in countries where using Western technology is unlikely, as it competes with the renowned F-35, performing to a similar level as that fighter. The country continues to receive most of China's military hardware as the two nations have worked together over many years. Ahmad (2020) points out that China's export of defense systems supports both its economic interests as well as its political role internationally. China is improving Pakistan's security at the same time as enhancing its role in South Asia and the wider Indian Ocean area.

### **Theoretical Framework: Alliances and Power Balancing**

For international relations, military alliances serve to even out power, stop aggression and keep an area stable. According to Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism (in the book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2001), the main goal of countries in a disorderly international environment is to increase their strength and alliances together to maintain survival. Here, the strong China-Pakistan military alliance is evidence of a strategy to stop India's regional advantage and minimize U.S. power. Yet, as Zhao (2022) points out, this relationship is more than just a traditional supplier-client alliance as now China is involved in developing joint technologies and doctrines. Conventional types of alliances have become less visible, as two sides come to depend on each other through a more symbiotic relationship. According to Zhao, success of the alliance is largely based on the fact that both nations remain interested in dealing with India's expanding armed forces and preserving important economic projects like the CPEC. It also allows China to influence South Asia by using Pakistan as its main partner.

### **Economic Dimensions: Protecting Critical Infrastructure**

All areas of cooperation between China and Pakistan, like safeguarding infrastructure, connect economics and security. The authors find that CPEC, an important Chinese initiative, depends heavily on secure airspace and constant intelligence. They point out that this enormous stretch from Kashgar in Xinjiang, through highly insurgency-risky regions, to the Gwadar port on Pakistan's shoreline contains well-known strategic weaknesses. In their paper, Khan and Liu claim that advanced aircraft such as the J-35A in

Pakistan's air force function as a security wall to guard against both attacks from non-state groups and traditional aggression. Because the alliance's economic and security parts work as one, modernizing its military helps China advance on the economic and geopolitical scenes. The partnership shows how air forces connect military planning and increasing economic activity, making a big difference in each.

### **Stealth Capabilities and Space-Based Intelligence: A New Dimension**

While people examine the hard equipment and partnerships of countries, not as much attention has been given to what the use of stealth and satellites means for airpower calculations in South Asia. Thanks to using China's Gaofen and Yaogan series, Pakistan is now able to see the battlefield in real time. Rana and Siddiqui (2023) believe this combination leads to an enhancement in finding targets, making electronic attacks and improving how missiles are aimed. Because of this technology, the two countries can work more closely, providing accurate and reliable air defense that threatens India's air forces. Zhao (2022) adds that this ability transfer builds an extra difficulty into Asia's power structure by closing the technology gap that India has taken advantage of. With new technology, the Kabul–Beijing–Islamabad group could sidestep the need for Western intelligence and influence how alliances and defense strategies are formed in Asia.

### **Gaps in Current Research**

Even though there is a lot of research on South Asian army improvements and China–Pakistan ties, there are still major gaps. Current literature does not fully merge studies of stealth operational use with the greater importance of space warfare for strategy. Very little research has been done on how India is responding strategically to these combined threats. In addition, many studies deal with economic and military issues individually; only a small number discuss the whole influence of advanced air power on defending infrastructure. This paper fills these gaps by analyzing the stealth alliance from several angles and how it impacts the regional air power map and security in South Asia.

Overall, research points to a challenging and fast-changing military and political picture in South Asia. Although India is making great efforts to upgrade its air force, China's rise in the defense industry and the improvements made to Pakistan's air arm are now causing concerns. China–Pakistan's relationship is a prime example of how modern partnerships combine technology, economic issues and geopolitical factors. This review stresses that the relationship between stealth aircraft and space-based intelligence will become vital to future changes in regional power. It introduces the research by explaining the need to inspect the technological, strategic and geopolitical elements of the stealth alliance.

### **Methodology**

For this study, qualitative content analysis was done on military reports, defense white papers and expert interviews, using geopolitical news from those years. It looks at the technology of the J-35A, Pakistan's purchasing of defense systems, the use of satellite intelligence and changes in regional military forces. Key themes recognized by thematic analysis are operational capabilities, strategic deterrence, economic security and alliance evolution. By combining information on technology with analysis of geopolitical situations, the research fully explains how the China–Pakistan stealth alliance impacts both sides

### **Discussion**

**How the J-35A Stealth Fighter Changed the Air Defense in North America:** Pakistan's air force achieving the J-35A Gyrfalcon represents a big upgrade in the region. This aircraft demonstrates China's highest level of exported stealth fighters, including a hidden air-frame, tie-ins with China's satellite navigation network, connectivity for airborne control and early warning and advanced missiles that can strike from a distance. By moving its J-35As to the key Gilgit–Baltistan region early on, Pakistan has clearly gone beyond getting new weapons and shown its commitment and ability to fight. The new fighters on this platform raise Pakistan's air force skills by enabling high-precision strikes, electronics warfare methods and defenses against drones. Joint trainings with China keep fostering the joint tactics and capabilities needed to reinforce both nations in face-offs at their mutual borders. Through joining forces, Pakistan is quickly catching up in the region when it comes to air power technology.

**Seeking a Changed Air Dominance in South Asia:** Receiving the Rafale multi-role fighter was praised as a major advance, allowing India to control the skies better by boosting stealth, avionics and missile systems. Still, deploying the J-35A cancels out a part of the threat. By using the connected architecture on the ground with other systems, the J-35A adjusts the region's air dominance and makes Pakistan more powerful than before. Because of this advancement, the Rafale's capability to defend and attack may be threatened, causing Indian strategic planners to reexamine how they protect and attack along the northern and western borders. Not only does the J-35A show an equal capability on both sides, but it introduces extra challenges in aerial fights over South Asia.

**Hiding Key Economics: Clothes Lifelines in Cloaking:** CPEC is at the heart of China's Belt and Road Initiative in South Asia, touching areas that are both key to security and important economically. With the J-35A aircraft providing on-site security and joined by information from space, CPEC is well protected. As a result, critical transit sites such as the Siachen Glacier and the Gwadar port are more secure, thanks to this aerial cover that helps resist both insurgency and military attacks. Cloaking these fighter jets over CPEC has strong strategic importance. Easy and reliable reactions prevent aggression and also guarantee that important investments are safe and that stability in the region is preserved.

**Kabul, Beijing and Islamabad are Joining Forces to Build a New Regional Triangle:** China and Pakistan are collaborating more closely which includes participation alongside Afghanistan in a trilateral strategic network now running under Taliban rule. Because of proper altitudes, stealth capabilities and real-time sharing of information, this Kabul-Beijing-Islamabad triangle is able to exercise its influence without being controlled by the West. The partnership improves the region's ability to act militarily, introduces new threats to existing world political order and increases China-Pakistan impact in the area. It leads to a new way of thinking and acting about regional security issues.

**Space Warfare: The Emerging Challenge in South Asian Defense:** Pakistan benefits from China's high-quality satellite system by receiving updated battlefield information – across air, maritime and land domains – almost instantaneously. Since it is based on Chinese technology, the network now supports Pakistan's military commanders with crucial new capabilities. Connecting these space assets to stealth aircraft shows that warfare today is based on operating in more than one area. Space-based intelligence adds strength to Pakistan's ability to go undetected by rivals and confuses how adversaries respond.

**Understanding the Coordinated Purchase and Costs of the J-35A:** Packing 30 new stealth fighters J-35A for roughly half the price of what the West offers is a smart move on Pakistan's part. With this purchase, Pakistan is shifting from being a common weapons consumer to help China with diplomacy, changing regional defense spending and becoming able to assist China in its larger geopolitical aims.

**Pakistan's Rise as a Leading Showcase of Military Power:** Pakistan's operations with advanced Chinese weapons in difficult landscapes capture worldwide interest. More and more countries reconsidering Western options use Pakistan's experiences in testing and combat as guidance. This role increases Pakistan's standing and role in weapons trade, making it a major player around the world in global defense matters.

**India's Main Strategic Problems and the Measures Needed to Respond:** The secret alliance adds to India's strategic risks because threats come from multiple sides at the same time. India's defense is strained by the way Afghanistan's influence has shrunk, Pakistan has become stronger in Gilgit-Baltistan and monitoring in the Indian Ocean has been improved. So, India should review its strategies by improving diplomacy, improving indigenous weapons and solidifying relationships in the region to preserve its balance.

## Findings

**The Key Points of the Strategic Change in South Asian Air Systems:** Asia is experiencing a fifth-generation fighter aircraft movement, for example: Japan is upgrading the sixth generation of aircraft



technology. Incorporating J-35A stealth fighters into the air force has given Pakistan a big step up, making it comparable to leading nations in using fifth-generation technology for warfare.

- **Combining Space-Based Intelligence in One Package:** Joining stealth platforms with China's leading satellite reconnaissance boosts awareness of the battlefield in real time which makes it better possible to observe, find targets and manage the operations.
- **Reduction of India's Advantage in Technology:** India's superiority in the air is being challenged as stealth technology and networked warfare weaken its defenses and help shape new aerial patterns in South Asia.

**Including Software; Tactical Fusion:** Both air forces focus on similar guidelines, as they train together and use shared tactics which encourages their forces to operate together easily.

- **Strengthened Deterrents and Stronger Border Controls:** Because of these achievements, Pakistan can respond rapidly and reliably to both traditional and non-traditional threats near border areas.
- **Pakistan's Major Role in the Afghan Task:** China now sees Pakistan as a partner in its own defense plan, showing cooperation beyond simply buying weapons.

### **Geopolitical Significance: China's Kabul–Beijing–Islamabad Relations**

- **Regional Security Architecture That is New:** Asia's stealth alliance joins Afghanistan, China and Pakistan to take advantage of their common borders, innovative solutions and intelligence in order to spread influence in the region. Getting around the traditional oversight of Western nations. Since it is not linked to the West, it creates new challenges for existing power centers in South Asia.
- **Problems for Actors Within the Region:** Because of the new arrangement, both India and neighboring countries need to make new diplomatic and military plans to meet the challenges in the area.

### **Safeguarding Economic Corridors: Link between Military and the Economy**

- **SEC protects the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC):** Because of the stealth alliance, key economic lifelines are better protected, allowing goods and investments for China's Belt and Road Initiative to always reach their destinations.
- **Preventing Attacks by Unbalanced and Conventional Threats:** Having stealth fighters allows us to defend against insurgency, sabotage and big conflicts on economic infrastructure.
- **Having Enough Strength at Home and Abroad for the Economy:** An improved military and healthy economy reinforce the stability of the China–Pakistan strategic relationship.

### **Adjusting the Power Structure in Regions and Looking Ahead**

- **Problems Faced by India's Armed Forces:** The alliance pushes India to spend more on developing its own technology and to deepen ties with neighboring countries.
- **Bringing Global Security Back:** Thanks to its new approach to air power and intelligence, the alliance is playing a major role in altering South Asian geopolitics.
- **There is a possibility for Both Peace and War:** As deterrence is improved, the current power balance introduces a danger of conflict which underlines the need for solid diplomatic efforts for managing relations.

## **Conclusion**

The new stealth alliance between China and Pakistan is reshaping the region's air power situation. Combining new stealth fighters, high-tech space-based systems and the safety of important commercial areas not only competes with India's mastery of the air above the region but also introduces a different way of keeping the region secure. Beyond arm swap, this alliance involves deep integration of mindsets and makes Pakistan an important frontline partner in China's overall approach. The Chinam–Pakistan–Afghan trilateral alliance adds new challenges to regional security because it functions outside of established Western-led groups. These advancements together affect who holds power, how armed forces operate and the reach of countries' interests, so they deserve serious thinking about strategy. Since further changes in military tactics are occurring faster, regional countries must update their defense systems

carefully and also raise their efforts in diplomacy to reduce the likelihood of escalation and handle competition properly. To prevent accidental conflict and ensure stability, policymakers need to lay focus on honesty, building trust and having open talks among many involved countries. Because technological development is happening fast, more research should focus on how new capabilities, for example, integrated use of stealth, cyber and space technologies, could shape future geopolitical trends in South Asia. Such analysis will help formulate policies that support sustainable history and partnership in this challenging region.

## Recommendations

In China and Pakistan, creating stability can be done by making activities open and talking about them.

- **Put Confidence-Building and Transparency Important Practices in Place:** Both nations should participate in regional projects that help reduce surprises and lessen the risk of war slipping out of control. Depending military exercises, locations of troops and weapon systems in an open manner will help create a more stable security landscape.
- **Increase the ways in which militaries can communicate with each other:** Holding frequent meetings and exchanges between China, Pakistan and nearby countries among which India is important will lead to trust and give outlets for resolving problems. Such channels help manage issues brought by rapid military upgrades and rivalry between tactics.
- **Stimuli to Disarmament and Arms Reduction:** Because of the rise in arms and use of new technology, China and Pakistan ought to engage in regional or worldwide agreements related to stealth and wars in space, helping to build regulations and habits that sustain peace over the years.

## For Leading Nations: Help Bring About Inclusive Diplomacy and Better Arms Control

- **Value Conversations About Worldwide Security:** Actors from the region and on a global scale should help set up inclusive platforms for dialogue among South Asian states about transparency, preventing conflicts and managing crises. They can guide countries in reaching agreement on standards and decrease their distrust.
- **Support Building Architectures that Involve Several Countries:** Supporting steps designed for teamwork in matters of security such as making agreements, joining forces for help when disasters strike and cooperation against terrorism, can eliminate dangerous rivalries and lead to lasting peace.
- **Promote agreed standards on upcoming military innovations:** Leading countries and overseas organizations need to work together to develop and uphold rules for stealth, cyber and space technology use so that arms races do not destabilize the world and create conflict.

## For India: Raise its Ability to Deal with Threats and Technical Issues

- **Increase the development of systems that can spot and defeat stealth and work across different domains:** India should concentrate on developing and using state-of-the-art radar and electronic equipment able to pick up and stop the J-35A stealth aircraft. Developing newest fighter planes, a unified air defense system and satellites for reconnaissance will help maintain control over the air both at national and regional levels.
- **Improve and Widen Defense Relationships:** India needs to deepen its strategic ties with new nations as well as regional states to respond to China-Pakistan cooperation. If India works more closely, conducts joint drills and exchanges technology with expert countries known for stealth and network-centric methods, it will improve its defense and relations internationally.
- **Official strategy should consider Cyber and Space Defense together:** In order to enhance national security, India should include cyber defense and space operations in its security measures and secure important sections of the nation's infrastructure and communication towers from expert threats.

## For Researchers: Learn More About the Evolution of Security Dynamics

- **Perform Long Term and Multiple-Discipline Studies:** Long-term research should be conducted on the growing impact of the China-Pakistan relationship on regional conflicts, military methods and

regional unification. Analysis of political science, military matters and technology will lead to complete findings.

- **Study the effects of public issues on the military and the relationship between civil society and military officials:** It is important also to review the results of security cooperation on political matters, relations between the military and other sectors and how people in South Asia define security.
- **Research advancements in technology and stability of strategies:** Research on how space assets, cyber warfare, AI and networked control play a role in security in the region will support future policymaking.

If these suggestions are followed, regional groups can find their way through the complex situations caused by the China–Pakistan stealth alliance, so that chances for stability and joint action in South Asia are better supported.

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