

The Asim Munir Conundrum and Indian Options

Introduction

In an era where global norms and conventions once held sacrosanct are today seen as tools of opportuneness; strategic partnerships are resultantly being measured in instant deliverables than principles. The United States (US), for long being the self-proclaimed custodian of the 'Rules-based Order', has itself breached these norms occasionally to forfeit moral authority to define the next set. The contemporary American foreign policy is keen on prioritising immediate gains over ideological consistency. Pakistan Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, with his elevated status and firm control over Pakistan's security apparatus, has been invited (visited) the US twice in the last two months. The US administration's assignation with Munir is a clear example of this policy. It also emphasises the persistent spectacle where Washington episodically remembers Pakistan's usefulness, when the situation so dictates. The US actions are motivated by its self-interests rather than fundamental changes in its long-term strategic alignment.

Even as the Pakistan Chief presents himself as the most effective and decisive US partner, such embodiments from the US can encourage risky adventurism from Pakistan. India's challenge is to exploit this disorder to further its own interests. Its best interests are achieved by remaining unruffled, acting with exactitude, and letting its intrinsic strength play out such episodes.¹

The United States' Engagement with Pakistan Chief of The Army Staff

Munir has visited the US in quick succession in the last two months. On 18 Jun 2025, he found himself on a sudden luncheon date with US President Donald Trump, making it the first time Trump hosted a military Chief rather than the head of State in such a setting. He also interacted with US think tanks, scholars, and media, aiming to recalibrate Pakistan's global narrative and expand ties beyond security issues. He promoted Pakistan's counterterrorism role, economic potential, and commitment to regional stability while warning against hybrid warfare. Munir urged transforming Pakistan-US relations into a multidimensional partnership based on strategic convergence and mutual respect.²

Munir's second visit came in the first week of Aug 2025, purportedly aimed at expanding military-to-military ties and attending the farewell and change-of-command ceremonies of the US Central Command Commander General Michael E Kurilla and his successor, Admiral Brad Cooper, at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa. The optics of both the events were as lurid as the tacit message that the US still sees value in Pakistan's military strongman.

Munir also held talks with senior US defence and political officials, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dan Caine. He affianced Pakistan's diaspora, urging them to support national investment and development. The visit coincided with enhanced US–Pakistan alignment on counterterrorism and the US designation of Baloch insurgent groups as terrorist organisations. For India, this is neither a surprise nor a cause for panic, but a cue to recalibrate its stance for an increasingly chaotic world order.

Tampa Dinner Episode

In a private dinner during the recent visit, Asim Munir threatened to target the Reliance-operated Jamnagar refinery.³ He made his provocative proclamations including the nuclear threats, Indus River comments, and the Mercedes vs dump truck analogy during a black-tie dinner on 08 Aug 2025, held in Tampa, Florida. The event was hosted by businessman and Pakistan's honorary consul Adnan Asad, and included around 150 guests from the military, business, and diplomatic communities.

Munir's statements made from the US soil epitomise a clear escalation in Pakistan's rhetorical posture toward India. The threat scripts a shift from targeting military objectives in future conflicts to key economic and energy infrastructure. The explicit pointing to the Jamnagar economic hub also signals a disturbing readiness to shift from battlefield confrontation to economic disruption strategies. He referenced a social media post that paired a Quranic verse (from Surah Al-Fil) with a photo of Mukesh Ambani, saying it was meant to convey, "What we will do the next time". Munir also said that if Pakistan faced an existential threat, "We'll take half the world down with us". He also threatened to destroy future Indian dams on the Indus with missiles and warned about missile strikes if the Indus Waters Treaty remains suspended. Munir's discourse intertwined theology and nationalism, beginning with scriptural recitation, invoking Pakistan's founding on the Kalimah, and appealing to a sense of divine destiny.

India should look at such orotundity not as a cause for concern but as a consequence of the global flux, the Trump factor, and a test of its strategic maturity and resilience in a turbulent world order.

The United States–Munir Affiliation

The US has unfailingly preferred dealing with Pakistani dictators over its civilian leaders—from Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf to Asim Munir—because of the operational advantage that civilian governments cannot match. Munir's role in foreign policy reflects the traditional authority of Pakistani military Chiefs in shaping external alignments. For the US, the Pakistan Army offers strategic geographic leverage as Islamabad sits at the confluence of South Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, and

China's Belt and Road corridor. This gives it logistical and intelligence significance in US reckonings for Central Asia, Iran, and even Chinese containment.⁴ Pakistan Army, in comparison to its unstable civilian governments, is a centralised and dependable conduit for executing tactical aims, and a more reliable partner for short-term priorities like managing Afghanistan, countering Chinese influence, and addressing regional security. Munir also offers a means to handle crises, expediate back-channel talks, and influence theatres where the US has limited reach.

Pakistan's calamitous economic state gives Munir added sway, as both allies and adversaries recognise that army's leadership remains guarantor of policy continuity.

Implications of Munir's Rhetoric

Asim Munir's belligerent grandiloquence and openly brandishing nuclear preferences seems to be a premeditated attempt at consolidating his domestic authority, averting attention from Pakistan's economic and political crises, and revitalising the 'Madman Nuclear Doctrine'. By dispensing threats from the US soil, Munir has sought to concurrently caution India and prompt the US of Pakistan's disruptive capacity, possibly intending to leverage diplomatic, military, or economic concessions. With American attention and probable concessions in hand, Munir may be tempted into deliberate miscalculations, misreading ceasefires or pauses for more aggressive posturing against India. The danger is not just direct military action, but the use of hybrid tactics like terror proxies, ceasefire violations, and diplomatic brinkmanship to test India's resolve.⁵ Any such attempts may prove counterproductive for Pakistan, particularly considering Operation Sindoor's spotlighting of Pakistan's proxy vulnerabilities and India's formidable deterrence, which is more agile and less tolerant of nuclear brinkmanship.

India recognises that global powers operate on shifting interests and not fixed loyalties. As alliances and equations change, India must stay adaptable and work realistically to shape these shifts in its favour.

India's Options

India's quick and robust diplomatic rebuttal underscores the high stakes and heightened tensions in the regional security dynamics. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) strongly denounced Munir's remarks, dismissing them as "Nuclear sabre-rattling" and asserting that New Delhi would not be cowed by nuclear blackmail. The MEA called Pakistan an "Irresponsible state with nuclear weapons".

India should continue to respond with strategic patience, confidence, and focus on long-term interests, resisting overreactions to oculi of the US–Pakistan engagements. Washington's transactional military flings with Pakistan cannot

diminish India's structural and enduring value as a stable democracy, resilient economy, vast market, and reliable partner. India should pursue strategic autonomy by following independent policies, whether in energy imports from Russia, trade deals with the European Union, or assertive water diplomacy and, simultaneously, espousing conditional reciprocity to reward cooperation and penalise hostility.⁶ Consolidating intrinsic strengths such as demographics, political stability, and economic self-reliance is essential for resilience and deterrence, alongside strategic communication, to expose Pakistan's nuclear brinkmanship as the habitual tactic of an irresponsible state, reinforcing global awareness of the threat this poses to regional stability. Ultimately, the Munir episode is a reminder that the US will act in pursuit of its interests, and India's task is to leverage its growing influence to ensure such tactical gestures become irrelevant.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Munir episode is a lesson in realpolitik. The US will continue to pursue its interests, even if it means engaging with actors that are anathema to its stated values. India must carefully manage emergent regional alignments, diplomatic sensitivities, and domestic political optics amid a fast-changing geopolitical environment. It should act with sureness, leverage its growing power, and build a strategic posture robust enough to tackle passing the US flirtations with Pakistan.

Endnotes

¹ Express News Service, 'Indo-US Ties Face Difficult Moments', *The Morning Standard*, 09 Aug 2025, accessed 16 Aug 2025 <https://www.magzter.com/stories/newspaper/The-Morning-Standard/INDOUS-TIES-FACE-DIFFICULT-MOMENTS?srltid=AfmBOorUUGt2xtoK5Djtpa1ywsZQxN0a3c8Rc5p5O5IEF3cedLNI9Oq>

² Omer Farooq Khan, 'Pak Army Chief courts US Opinion Makers amid bid to reset strategic ties', *The Times of India*, 22 Jun 2025, 15 Aug 2025 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/pak-army-chief-asim-munir-courts-us-opinion-makers-amid-bid-to-reset-strategic-ties/articleshow/121982646.cms>

³ Shubhajit Roy, 'The importance of Chief of the Pakistan Army Syed Asim Munir', *Indian Express*, 14 Aug 2025, accessed 15 Aug 2025 <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/the-importance-of-chief-of-the-pakistan-army-syed-asim-munir-10187755/>; and Chidanand Rajghatta, 'Pakistan General Makes Extraordinary Nuclear Threat from US soil', *The Times of India*, 11 Aug 2025, accessed 12 Aug 2025 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/pakistan-general-makes-extraordinary-nuclear-threat-from-us-soil/articleshow/123221028.cms>

⁴ Jyoti Malhotra, 'Global Lessons in Realpolitik', *The Tribune*, 21 Jun 2025, accessed 15 Aug 2025 <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/global-lessons-in-realpolitik/>

⁵ Rana Banerji, 'Pakistan's woes persist amidst Munir's Rise', *The Tribune*, 14 Jul 2025, accessed 16 Aug 2025 <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/pakistans-woes-persist-amid-asim-munirs-rise/>

⁶ Tilak Devasher, 'India no longer a Soft State to Suffer Pakistan in Silence', *The Tribune*, 12 Jul 2025, accessed 15 Aug 2025 <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/premium/india-no-longer-a-soft-state-to-suffer-pakistan-in-silence/>

Brigadier PP Singh, AVSM, VSM (Retd.) is an Indian Army veteran with three and a half decades of distinguished service. He has held key command roles in counterinsurgency and border operations and has been a faculty member in various Category A Institutions of Indian Army. Post-retirement, he is a Senior Research Fellow at the United Service

Institution of India and actively contributes to defence analysis and strategic affairs discourse.

Article uploaded on 19-08-2025

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisation that he belongs to or of the USI of India.