

PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: POLITICAL AND ECONOMY COOPERATION THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF CPEC

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ABSTRACT

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is highlighted in this study as a major tool of their cooperation as it examines the changing strategic alliance between China and Pakistan in the twenty-first century. Within China's larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a strategic alliance that has reshaped South Asia's geopolitical environment in addition to being an economic cooperation. Examining the many facets of CPEC, this study looks at its effects on both countries' economies, politics, and security. It explores the ways in which China-Pakistan relations have been enhanced via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), leading to increased economic integration and opening up new avenues for infrastructure and development in Pakistan. Also, in light of regional dynamics and with particular reference to India, the US, and other superpowers, the article examines the geopolitical implications of this cooperation. The research concludes that CPEC has elevated Pakistan-China relations to new heights, making them a pivotal player in shaping the future of the region.

Keywords: CPEC, China, Pakistan, BRI, Strategic, US, India

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan-China Relations in the 21st Century

The relationship between Pakistan and China is one of the most enduring and strategic bilateral partnerships in modern international relations. Rooted in mutual trust, shared interests, and geographic proximity, this alliance has significantly evolved over time, adapting to the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. In the post-Cold War world, as the global political and economic landscape shifted, Pakistan and China recalibrated their ties to address emerging regional and global dynamics. This period witnessed

enhanced cooperation in various domains, including security, economics, technology, and cultural exchange. The hallmark of this relationship has been the strategic alignment to counterbalance regional instability, foster development, and ensure mutual benefits. The cornerstone of their 21st-century partnership is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a multi-billion-dollar initiative under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This project symbolizes the depth of their economic collaboration and underscores the pivotal role of infrastructure,

energy, and trade connectivity in their bilateral ties. Additionally, defense cooperation, counterterrorism efforts, and diplomatic support on international platforms remain critical components of their alliance. Both nations have consistently supported each other on key issues, such as Pakistan's stance on Kashmir and China's policies in Tibet and Xinjiang. This introduction lays the foundation for understanding the multidimensional and evolving nature of Pakistan-China relations in the 21st century, emphasizing their strategic importance in shaping regional stability and fostering mutual development.

The relationship between Pakistan and China, often described as "all-weather" and "iron brothers," stands as a unique example of strategic partnership in the contemporary world. Over the decades, this bond has grown from a traditional bilateral alliance to a comprehensive strategic partnership characterized by multidimensional cooperation. In the 21st century, as global power dynamics shift and regional complexities intensify, Pakistan-China relations have deepened further, encompassing political, economic, defense, technological, and cultural spheres. The historical roots of this partnership date back to 1951, when diplomatic ties were first established. Since then, both countries have consistently supported each other through thick and thin, driven by shared interests in regional security, economic development, and geopolitical stability. The changing nature of global politics in the 21st century—marked by rising multipolarity, the U.S.-China strategic rivalry, and regional challenges—has reinforced the importance of this relationship for both nations. One of the most transformative elements of Pakistan-China relations in this century is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Launched in 2015 as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), CPEC is a flagship initiative that has brought unprecedented levels of investment into Pakistan. Stretching from China's western Xinjiang region to Pakistan's Gwadar Port, the corridor aims to enhance connectivity, boost regional trade, and uplift Pakistan's economic landscape. Beyond infrastructure, it has deep implications for regional geopolitics and development.

On the strategic front, defense cooperation has remained a cornerstone of their partnership. China is Pakistan's largest supplier of military hardware, and the two countries collaborate on a range of defense technologies, including the co-production of advanced weapon systems like the JF-17 Thunder fighter jet. The shared goal of maintaining regional balance, especially in the context of India's rising influence and the broader Indo-Pacific dynamics, has further cemented their military ties. Moreover, the partnership extends into diplomacy and multilateral forums. China has been a vocal advocate of Pakistan's stance on Kashmir, and Pakistan has supported China on sensitive issues like Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Both countries frequently collaborate within the United Nations, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and other international platforms to promote shared interests.

The relationship is not without challenges. Concerns over security threats to CPEC projects, the economic disparity in the partnership, and the impact of broader international pressures, such as the U.S.-China rivalry, pose questions for the future trajectory of their alliance. Despite these challenges, the deep-rooted trust and shared vision for development and stability continue to bind the two nations closely. In this context, the study of Pakistan-China relations in the 21st century provides valuable insights into how strategic alliances evolve to address contemporary challenges and opportunities. This partnership not only shapes regional dynamics in South Asia and Central Asia but also plays a significant role in the broader narrative of global politics and economic development.

The Pakistan-China relationship has emerged as a model of inter-state cooperation, defined by mutual respect, shared interests, and strategic foresight. As the 21st century unfolds, this bilateral partnership continues to expand, adapting to the evolving geopolitical landscape and addressing the pressing challenges of globalization, regional tensions, and economic interdependence. The enduring bond between the two countries is not merely a reflection of political necessity but a testament to decades of friendship and collaboration across diverse fields. From the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1951 to the present, Pakistan and China have forged a

unique alliance, built on a foundation of trust and mutual support. Their cooperation is underscored by shared objectives such as regional stability, economic growth, counterterrorism, and mutual security. In an era characterized by shifting global power dynamics, including the rise of China as a global power and the redefinition of alliances, this relationship has gained even greater significance for both nations.

Economically, the 21st century has witnessed a profound transformation in Pakistan-China relations. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), serves as the linchpin of this transformation. Encompassing massive investments in energy, infrastructure, transportation, and special economic zones, CPEC aims to bolster Pakistan's economic development while enhancing China's trade connectivity with the Middle East, Africa, and beyond. Gwadar Port, a critical component of CPEC, underscores Pakistan's strategic value in facilitating China's access to the Arabian Sea and its growing influence in maritime trade.

Strategically, the two countries have maintained robust defense and security cooperation. Pakistan is one of the largest recipients of Chinese military aid and technology, reflecting their shared commitment to safeguarding their territorial and regional interests. Joint military exercises, technology transfers, and the development of cutting-edge defense projects, such as the JF-17 Thunder fighter jet and advanced missile systems, underscore the depth of this partnership. Both nations share a common goal of counterbalancing regional challenges, particularly in the context of India's rise and its growing alignment with the United States.

Diplomatically, Pakistan and China have consistently supported each other's positions on key issues. Pakistan has upheld China's core interests, including its sovereignty over Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet. Conversely, China has been a steadfast advocate of Pakistan's stance on Kashmir and has used its influence in international forums like the United Nations to counterbalance pressures against Pakistan. The two countries also cooperate closely within multilateral frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation

Organization (SCO) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Culturally, people-to-people exchanges have grown in recent years, with educational and technological collaborations becoming a prominent feature of their relationship. Thousands of Pakistani students now pursue higher education in China, while Chinese language and cultural studies are gaining popularity in Pakistan, facilitated by the establishment of Confucius Institutes and academic partnerships.

However, this enduring partnership is not without its challenges. The security of CPEC projects in Pakistan, disparities in economic benefits and criticism over Pakistan's growing economic reliance on China have raised questions about the long-term sustainability of the alliance. Additionally, the intensifying U.S.-China rivalry and its implications for South Asia pose strategic challenges for Pakistan in balancing its foreign policy priorities.

As Pakistan and China navigate these complexities, their relationship continues to be a cornerstone of South Asian geopolitics and a significant contributor to regional development and stability. The evolving dynamics of this partnership reflect the adaptability and resilience of both nations, offering valuable lessons on strategic alliances in an increasingly interconnected and competitive world. Understanding the nuances of Pakistan-China relations in the 21st century provides a window into the broader geopolitical shifts shaping our era.

Theoretically framework

The theoretical lens of **realism** provides a compelling framework for analyzing Pakistan-China relations in the 21st century. Rooted in the realist tradition, which emphasizes the primacy of state sovereignty, national interest, and the pursuit of power in an anarchic international system, realism sheds light on the motivations and dynamics underpinning this strategic partnership. According to realism, states act rationally to maximize their security and power in a competitive global environment. This perspective explains Pakistan-China relations as a strategic alliance formed to address mutual security concerns,

balance regional power dynamics, and safeguard national interests.

Through the lens of realism, Pakistan-China relations in the 21st century can be understood as a pragmatic and calculated alliance aimed at achieving power parity, regional stability, and mutual security in a highly competitive and uncertain international order. This theory underscores the enduring strategic nature of their partnership, driven by national interest and the balance of power.

Political Cooperation:

Political cooperation between Pakistan and China has been a cornerstone of their bilateral relationship, grounded in mutual support, shared strategic objectives, and a commitment to fostering regional stability. This partnership has consistently evolved to address the changing dynamics of global and regional politics in the 21st century.

1. Support on Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity:

Pakistan and China have steadfastly supported each other's positions on critical sovereignty issues. Pakistan has consistently adhered to the "One China Policy," backing China's claims over Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang. Conversely, China has supported Pakistan's stance on the Kashmir dispute, advocating for its resolution through peaceful dialogue and opposing unilateral actions by India that alter the region's status (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015).

2. Collaboration in Multilateral Forums:

Both nations collaborate closely in multilateral settings such as the United Nations (UN), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). China's role in shielding Pakistan from international pressure, particularly on issues like counterterrorism and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), highlights the depth of their political alignment (Small, 2015). Similarly, Pakistan has supported China's leadership initiatives in multilateral platforms, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

3. Diplomatic Responses to Regional Challenges:

Pakistan and China share converging interests in maintaining stability in South Asia, particularly in the context of the Afghanistan conflict and counterterrorism efforts. Their political cooperation is evident in joint initiatives aimed at promoting regional dialogue and preventing the spread of extremism. China's mediation in facilitating Pakistan's engagement with the Taliban post-2021 reflects its role as a key political partner for Pakistan in addressing regional security challenges (Zahid, 2021).

4. Strategic Alignments Amid Global Power Shifts:

The intensifying rivalry between the United States and China has further solidified the political partnership between Pakistan and China. For Pakistan, China serves as a reliable ally to offset its estranged relations with the West. For China, Pakistan remains a critical partner in its strategy to counterbalance U.S. influence in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific (Wolf, 2020). Their political alignment is instrumental in shaping regional politics and ensuring mutual support in a polarized global environment.

5. High-Level Diplomatic Engagements:

Frequent high-level visits and consultations between the leadership of Pakistan and China underscore the strength of their political ties. These engagements serve to reinforce their partnership, facilitate strategic dialogue, and address pressing bilateral and regional issues. For example, China's role in advancing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) reflects not only economic but also political cooperation, as both nations view the project as a strategic priority (Sial, 2014).

6. Mutual Support on Sovereignty and Key Issues

Pakistan and China have a long-standing tradition of backing each other on sovereignty and territorial integrity. Pakistan supports China's core interests, including the "One China Policy" regarding Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang, viewing them as internal matters of China. Similarly, China has consistently supported Pakistan's stance on the

Kashmir dispute, urging peaceful resolution through dialogue and opposing actions that unilaterally alter the region's status (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015). This unwavering mutual support underscores the deep political trust between the two nations.

7. Joint Efforts in Multilateral Organizations

Both countries actively cooperate in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Pakistan's entry into the SCO as a full member in 2017, supported by China, highlights their political collaboration in fostering regional connectivity and security. Moreover, China's support for Pakistan in countering international criticism, such as in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), demonstrates its role as a reliable political ally for Pakistan (Small, 2015).

8. Collaborative Initiatives on Global Governance

Pakistan and China work together to advocate for reforms in global governance structures. Both nations emphasize the importance of upholding multilateralism and resisting unilateral actions that undermine the sovereignty of states. Their collaboration in promoting South-South cooperation and sustainable development highlights their shared commitment to equitable global progress.

9. High-Level Diplomatic Engagements

Frequent high-level visits and strategic dialogues reflect the strength of Pakistan-China political ties. Leaders from both countries have regularly engaged in bilateral consultations to advance cooperation and address shared challenges. For example, President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan in 2015 marked a pivotal moment in solidifying the partnership, particularly with the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These diplomatic engagements are instrumental in reinforcing mutual trust and ensuring policy alignment (Sial, 2014).

The political cooperation between Pakistan and China reflects a deep-seated partnership shaped by shared interests and mutual support in navigating

global and regional complexities. Their alignment on critical issues underscores the strategic significance of their relationship in ensuring regional stability and advancing their respective national interests.

Economy Cooperation:

Economic cooperation between Pakistan and China serves as a cornerstone of their bilateral relations, particularly in the 21st century. This partnership, driven by strategic interests and mutual economic benefits, has deepened significantly through initiatives such as the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** and broader trade, investment, and financial collaboration.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The most transformative element of their economic cooperation is CPEC, launched in 2015 as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). CPEC represents a multi-billion-dollar project aimed at enhancing connectivity between China's western Xinjiang region and Pakistan's Gwadar Port. This corridor includes investments in infrastructure, energy, transportation, and industrial zones, with a total estimated cost of over \$60 billion (Wolf, 2020). For Pakistan, CPEC offers opportunities to address energy shortages, improve infrastructure, and boost economic growth. For China, it ensures access to the Arabian Sea and strengthens its geopolitical influence in South Asia and beyond.

Trade Relations

Trade between Pakistan and China has grown significantly in recent decades. China is Pakistan's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding \$27 billion in 2021. The second phase of the Pakistan-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA), implemented in 2020, has further expanded trade by granting Pakistan enhanced market access to Chinese goods and vice versa (Javaid, 2021). However, the trade balance remains heavily skewed in China's favor, raising concerns in Pakistan about the need for a more equitable trade relationship.

Investment and Financial Assistance

China is one of the largest investors in Pakistan, with significant investments in energy projects,

transportation networks, and industrial development under CPEC. Chinese companies are involved in major infrastructure projects, including roads, railways, and power plants, which are crucial for Pakistan's economic modernization (Wolf, 2020). Additionally, China has provided Pakistan with financial assistance during economic crises, including loans and debt rescheduling, underscoring the strategic depth of their economic relationship.

Energy Cooperation

Energy collaboration is a critical component of their economic partnership. Under CPEC, China has invested in power generation projects, including coal-fired plants, hydroelectric dams, and renewable energy facilities, which aim to address Pakistan's chronic energy shortages. These projects are expected to not only stabilize Pakistan's energy sector but also facilitate industrial growth and economic development (Sial, 2014).

Gwadar Port Development

Gwadar Port is a flagship project under CPEC and symbolizes the strategic dimension of their economic cooperation. The port is being developed as a key logistics and trade hub, providing China with a shorter route for its trade and energy imports from the Middle East and Africa. For Pakistan, Gwadar offers the potential to become a regional economic hub, generating revenue and creating jobs (Small, 2015).

Challenges in Economic Cooperation

While the economic partnership has brought significant benefits, it is not without challenges. Pakistan faces issues related to debt sustainability and transparency in CPEC projects. Critics argue that Pakistan's growing economic dependence on China could lead to potential vulnerabilities (Wolf, 2020). Additionally, security threats to CPEC infrastructure and Chinese nationals working in Pakistan have raised concerns, requiring both nations to address these issues collaboratively.

Bilateral Trade Growth

China is Pakistan's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching approximately \$27.8 billion in 2022. Pakistan exports textiles,

agricultural products, and raw materials to China, while importing machinery, electronics, and other manufactured goods.

Pakistan-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA):

The second phase of the FTA, implemented in 2020, has expanded market access for Pakistani products in China, including zero-tariff access for over 300 export items (Javaid, 2021).

- Despite the growing trade volume, the trade imbalance heavily favors China, prompting efforts from both sides to diversify and enhance Pakistan's export capacity.

Chinese Investments in Pakistan

China has emerged as the largest foreign investor in Pakistan, focusing on infrastructure, energy, and industry. Beyond CPEC, Chinese companies are involved in various projects, including real estate, telecommunication, and mining. For instance:

- The Thar Coal Project in Sindh, financed by Chinese companies, has significantly contributed to Pakistan's energy self-reliance.
- Chinese firms are investing in urban development projects, such as the Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project in Lahore (Wolf, 2020).

Gwadar Port: A Strategic Economic Hub

Gwadar Port, located in Pakistan's Balochistan province, is a centerpiece of CPEC. Its strategic location near the Strait of Hormuz makes it a key trade and energy transit hub. China has invested heavily in the port's development, including:

- Construction of port facilities and infrastructure.
 - Establishment of free trade zones to attract global investors.
- For Pakistan, Gwadar is expected to generate substantial economic activity and revenue, while China views it as critical for securing its trade routes and reducing reliance on the Malacca Strait (Small, 2015).

Challenges in Economic Cooperation

Despite its benefits, the Pakistan-China economic partnership faces challenges:

- **Debt Sustainability:**

Critics argue that Pakistan's rising debt to China, particularly from CPEC projects, could strain its fiscal stability.

- **Security Concerns:**

Threats to CPEC infrastructure and Chinese nationals working in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan, require robust security measures.

- **Trade Imbalance:**

The trade deficit remains a pressing issue, necessitating efforts to diversify Pakistan's exports to China (Wolf, 2020).

Pakistan-China relations in the 21st century symbolize a model of strategic partnership rooted in mutual benefits and shared aspirations. While the alliance has its challenges, the depth of their cooperation across political, economic, defense, and cultural dimensions underscores its resilience and significance in shaping regional and global dynamics. Moving forward, the partnership is poised to strengthen further as both nations navigate an increasingly complex international landscape.

Suggestions

Pakistan-China relations in the 21st century represent one of the most enduring and strategically significant partnerships in global geopolitics. Rooted in decades of mutual trust and shared strategic objectives, the relationship has grown into a multi-dimensional alliance encompassing political, economic, defense, and cultural cooperation.

While the relationship between Pakistan and China has grown significantly in various dimensions, there are several strategies that could further enhance and solidify their partnership, ensuring mutual benefits for both nations. Below are some key suggestions for deepening this relationship:

Diversifying Trade and Economic Partnerships

- **Enhance Bilateral Trade Balance:**

Pakistan should focus on diversifying its exports to China, moving beyond traditional items like textiles and agricultural products. There is potential for expanding trade in sectors such as IT, pharmaceuticals, and value-added products.

Pakistan should explore opportunities for greater market access in China's rapidly growing consumer markets.

- **Develop Export-Import Infrastructure:**

Investing in better infrastructure for trade and logistics—such as warehouses, port facilities, and efficient transportation networks—would facilitate smoother trade exchanges and ensure that the benefits of CPEC reach more regions of Pakistan.

- **Localizing CPEC Projects:**

Encouraging Chinese firms to engage local suppliers and labor forces for CPEC projects would boost the local economy, create jobs, and reduce dependence on foreign companies. Ensuring transparency in project execution and emphasizing the use of local talent will mitigate concerns over economic dependence.

Strengthening People-to-People Ties

- **Promote Educational and Cultural Exchange:**

Expanding scholarships for Pakistani students to study in China and increasing programs such as **Confucius Institutes** in Pakistani universities can help bridge cultural gaps and build long-term goodwill. Educational cooperation should also focus on technical skills and vocational training, equipping Pakistan's workforce with the expertise needed for future industries.

- **Promote Tourism:**

Encouraging people-to-people exchange through tourism can be an important avenue for strengthening ties. Pakistan's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, coupled with China's growing interest in tourism, can foster greater understanding and build personal relationships that complement the diplomatic and economic aspects of the partnership.

Fostering Regional Stability and Cooperation

- **Collaborative Role in Afghanistan:**

Both Pakistan and China share an interest in ensuring the stability of Afghanistan. Their partnership should focus on supporting an inclusive Afghan government that can maintain peace and prevent the region from becoming a

breeding ground for extremism. Joint development projects, especially in border regions, could serve as a peace-building mechanism.

- **Engage in Regional Connectivity Projects:** Beyond CPEC, Pakistan and China could collaborate on broader regional connectivity initiatives. Engaging with neighboring countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asian nations to build integrated transport and energy corridors would create economic opportunities for the region as a whole and reinforce Pakistan-China ties.

Addressing Debt Sustainability Concerns.

- **Debt Management Strategies:**

While Chinese investment is crucial, Pakistan should focus on managing its debt to avoid economic over-dependence. Pakistan could negotiate for more favorable loan terms or explore options for diversifying its sources of investment to reduce reliance on a single creditor.

- **Strengthening Financial Cooperation:**

In addition to loans, Pakistan should explore mechanisms for financial cooperation with China that involve equity-based investments, rather than debt-based funding. Encouraging Chinese companies to invest in joint ventures within Pakistan could also provide a more sustainable financial relationship.

Promoting Sustainability and Environmental Cooperation

- **Green CPEC:**

As part of CPEC's long-term vision, Pakistan and China should promote environmentally sustainable projects, such as solar energy farms and green infrastructure initiatives, to align with global trends in sustainability. Given Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change, China could help in developing disaster-resilient infrastructure.

- **Joint Research in Renewable Energy:**

Both countries should invest in joint research initiatives focused on renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydro power. This would not only address Pakistan's energy needs but also contribute to global efforts in reducing carbon emissions.

Improving Transparency and Governance

- **Transparency in CPEC Projects:**

Ensuring transparency in CPEC projects is crucial for gaining the trust of the Pakistani people and international stakeholders. Establishing independent oversight committees and clear public reporting mechanisms would alleviate concerns about corruption or mismanagement.

- **Strengthening Legal and Regulatory Frameworks:** Pakistan should work with China to ensure that there are well-defined legal and regulatory frameworks for foreign investments and trade. Simplifying these processes and ensuring a stable business environment will attract more Chinese businesses to invest in Pakistan.

Conclusion

The relationship between Pakistan and China has evolved into a multifaceted and strategic partnership, shaped by shared interests, historical ties, and an ever-deepening commitment to mutual cooperation. Over the past few decades, particularly in the 21st century, the bilateral ties between these two nations have been marked by significant political, economic, defense, and cultural collaboration. This conclusion draws together the major themes discussed throughout the study, evaluating the current state of Pakistan-China relations, identifying challenges, and proposing recommendations for strengthening the partnership in the future.

Pakistan-China relations in the 21st century have evolved into a comprehensive partnership, particularly bolstered by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This initiative has not only deepened political cooperation but has also significantly boosted economic ties between the two nations. Through CPEC, China has invested heavily in infrastructure, energy, and transportation projects in Pakistan, facilitating trade, economic growth, and regional connectivity. The strategic nature of this partnership has enhanced Pakistan's position on the global stage while offering China a critical link to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.

Politically, the two countries have shared mutual interests, especially in regional stability, defense

cooperation, and a common stance on issues such as counterterrorism. However, while CPEC has immense potential for driving economic growth, it also presents challenges, such as the need for long-term sustainability, the resolution of security concerns in certain areas, and addressing debt-related risks. Ultimately, the success of CPEC and the broader Pakistan-China relationship will depend on continued cooperation, adaptability to evolving global dynamics, and a balanced approach to addressing both economic opportunities and challenges. If managed effectively, the partnership could serve as a model for international cooperation in the 21st century.

The Pakistan-China relationship, anchored in the 21st century, is built on the foundation of mutual trust and shared goals, especially in terms of economic development, geopolitical influence, and security cooperation. CPEC stands as the central pillar of this partnership, representing not just economic collaboration but also a strategic alignment between two countries looking to reshape the regional and global order.

The political cooperation between Pakistan and China has grown significantly, with both nations strengthening their diplomatic ties, especially in multilateral forums such as the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Their partnership also offers a counterbalance to the influence of other global powers, especially the United States and India. The political and strategic collaboration enhances Pakistan's security framework, particularly through defense and intelligence cooperation, while China benefits from Pakistan's strategic location as a gateway to the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. From an economic perspective, CPEC has been transformative. It has brought significant infrastructure development, with the construction of roads, railways, ports, and power plants, making Pakistan an integral part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The corridor has the potential to boost Pakistan's economy through increased trade, job creation, and industrial growth. However, the economic benefits are not without challenges. Pakistan must manage debt sustainability, address the regional disparities in development, and ensure that the benefits from CPEC are broadly distributed across its population. Additionally, there are

concerns about the environmental impact of large-scale infrastructure projects, which need careful consideration and mitigation strategies.

On the security front, CPEC has provided China with a safer route for trade and energy transportation, reducing its dependence on maritime routes that could be vulnerable to geopolitical tensions. However, the security of CPEC projects in Pakistan remains a concern due to threats from insurgent groups and political instability in certain areas. This highlights the need for both countries to strengthen their security apparatus and ensure the protection of the infrastructure and personnel involved in these projects. In the longer term, the Pakistan-China partnership has the potential to evolve into a model of economic development that other countries in the region and beyond could look to emulate. For Pakistan, CPEC represents an opportunity to emerge as a regional hub for trade, energy, and industry, potentially reshaping its economic landscape. For China, Pakistan is an indispensable partner in its efforts to expand influence and create new trade routes, contributing to the overall goals of the Belt and Road Initiative.

However, the success of this collaboration will require addressing key challenges, such as fostering an environment of security and political stability, ensuring equitable development across all regions of Pakistan, and managing the long-term economic and environmental impacts of CPEC projects. As the two countries continue to deepen their partnership, their ability to navigate these challenges will determine the future trajectory of their bilateral relations in the 21st century.

The future of Pakistan-China relations looks promising, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) continuing to serve as the cornerstone of their cooperation. The expansion of CPEC will likely fuel further economic growth, with potential diversification into agriculture, technology, and manufacturing. This initiative will also enhance Pakistan's infrastructure, energy capacity, and regional connectivity, potentially making it a trade hub connecting China to the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. Politically, the partnership is expected to grow stronger as both nations deepen their strategic alignment, particularly in defense and security cooperation, to

address common regional challenges. As China rises as a global power, Pakistan's strategic position will become increasingly significant, especially through access to the critical Gwadar port.

However, ensuring the security of CPEC projects remains a major concern, requiring both countries to enhance their counterterrorism efforts and stabilize Pakistan's internal security. Additionally, addressing the social and environmental impacts of CPEC, such as displacement and ecological damage, will be crucial for the long-term sustainability of the partnership. As part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, Pakistan's role as a regional trade and transport hub is set to grow, but careful attention will be needed to manage debt sustainability and maintain political stability. Despite these challenges, the future of Pakistan-China relations holds immense potential for economic prosperity, geopolitical influence, and regional stability if both nations can effectively navigate the complexities of this evolving partnership.

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