

BELT, ROAD, AND BEYOND: TRANSFORMING GEOPOLITICS THROUGH THE PAKISTAN-CHINA ALLIANCE

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ABSTRACT

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, economic, military, and geopolitical cooperation have all flourished, further reinforcing Pakistan and China's strategic relationship. Central to this partnership are the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which seek to improve regional connectivity and transform Pakistan's infrastructure. In spite of setbacks, this coalition is still crucial for economic growth and regional geopolitics. This paper delves into the complex aspects of BRI and CPEC to analyze the strengthening of strategic connections between China and Pakistan under Xi Jinping's leadership. Its goal is to assess the potential benefits and drawbacks of this changing connection on regional growth and stability. The study uses secondary sources and a descriptive qualitative research strategy to provide a thorough examination of the geopolitical, economic, and strategic factors that define the Pakistan-China alliance. Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have played crucial roles in the strengthening of the economic, military, and geopolitical ties between China and Pakistan under Xi Jinping's presidency. Regardless of obstacles and geopolitical animosities, this dynamic partnership is essential for connectivity and stability in the area. For CPEC's inclusive and sustainable development, it is important to include local communities and stakeholders in order to guarantee fair benefits and resolve problems.

Keywords: Regional connectivity, Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative, China-Pakistan ties

INTRODUCTION

China and Pakistan's strategic cooperation has flourished under Xi Jinping's leadership, becoming an alliance with many facets. The economic, military, and geopolitical arenas are all interconnected parts of this partnership that has its origins in similar goals and objectives. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the backbone of this collaboration, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is its crown jewel. Through massive infrastructure development, including energy projects, trains, and highways, this all-

encompassing plan seeks to improve regional connections and alter Pakistan's economic scene. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, the Pakistan-China strategic alliance has taken on new dimensions, reflecting a convergence of interests that goes beyond economic cooperation. This has placed both countries at the center of South Asian and global geopolitical dynamics.¹ The BRI, China's grand global development plan that includes investments and infrastructure development in a number of nations, is the driving force behind this

¹ Swati, Noreen Iqbal, Hassan Farooq Mashwani, and Syed Ali Raza. "Sino-Pak Strategic

Partnership in Xi Jinping Era and Indian Reaction." *Pakistan Research Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2024).

strategic relationship. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aspires to reestablish new trade and economic corridors along the old Silk Road routes. Beyond its economic significance, CPEC has the ability to alter the course of events in Pakistan. It takes use of Pakistan's advantageous position to help China trade and link economically with other regions throughout the globe, such as Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. In particular, the growth of the deep-sea port of Gwadar, which is close to the Strait of Hormuz, is noteworthy. The strategic asset helps alleviate China's "Malacca Dilemma," the country's dependence on energy imports across the small and politically delicate Strait of Malacca. It also acts as a center for international commerce.²

Pakistan stands to benefit in several ways from CPEC's revolutionary potential. For Pakistan's economy, it means better access to international markets and more chances to trade. On a strategic level, it strengthens Pakistan's military might and establishes it as a major actor in the geopolitical landscape of the area. As an example, the development of Gwadar Port has several benefits, including improved commerce and marine security via cooperative naval patrols, which in turn helps stabilize the area. In addition, the goal of the massive infrastructure projects that are part of CPEC, such as the trains and highways, is to boost economic growth and development in Pakistan by bringing the country closer to the global economy.³ There are several obstacles to CPEC, especially in Pakistan, despite its potential benefits. The effects have been the subject of conflicting accounts. There is hope, on the one hand, for the potential economic gains and prosperity it may bring. However, others worry that this can lead to the same kind of abuse that the East India Company

experienced in the past. The significance of resolving local issues and guaranteeing equitable distribution of CPEC benefits is highlighted by these concerns. In places like Baluchistan, insurgency has intensified due to local discontent with resource exploitation, lack of engagement, and the sluggish implementation of specific projects. More inclusive development policies are needed since tensions have been heightened by the gap between infrastructure spending and the benefits actually received by local residents.⁴

Additional obstacles to the smooth execution of CPEC include the geopolitical interests of other world powers, namely India and the US. In addition to being an economic initiative, CPEC has become a focal point of strategic conflict due to the region's geopolitical rivalries. China and Pakistan have formed a strategic relationship under Xi Jinping's leadership, and this has far-reaching consequences for more than just their bilateral ties. Part of China's plan to increase its worldwide influence via economic diplomacy and infrastructural development is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).⁵ For economic security and to lessen reliance on marine chokepoints, China is investing in infrastructure and developing alternative trade routes. Beyond the purely strategic and economic considerations, there are substantial geopolitical ramifications to the cooperation between China and Xi Jinping. Many regional concerns are brought to light by the expansion of CPEC into Afghanistan and the possibility of connections with Iran. Achieving greater economic connectivity and influence throughout Asia and Europe is a goal of China's, and its growth is a reflection of that desire. If these trends continue, China may come to dominate

² Ali, Imran, Muhammad Faisal Nadeem, and Muhammad Aslam. "Towards Modern South-Asia: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor its Components, Challenges and Opportunities." *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2023): 53-67.

³ Ullah, Farid, Muhammad Yasir, Muhammad Yousaf Khan, and Farman Ullah. "STRENGTHENING TIES: THE EVOLUTION OF THE PAKISTAN-CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN THE XI JINPING

ERA." *International Journal of Social Sciences Bulletin*..... ISSN: 3007-1917/ 3007-1909 2, no. 4 (2024): 196-207.

⁴ Naseeb, Zoonia. "Geopolitical to Geostrategic: Pakistan and China Discovering New Convergent Outlook." *Pakistan Vision* 24, no. 1 (2023).

⁵ Rasool, Ghulam, Shah Nawaz Mangi, Adeel Ahmed, and Faisal Charan. "Examining the Odyssey of China Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Historical Perspective." *Zhongguo Kuangye Daxue Xuebao* 29, no. 3 (2024): 117-129.

regional geopolitics and tip the scales of power in its favor. In addition, the Iran-Pakistan-China Gas Pipeline and other BRI projects show that Iran is taking a realistic view of regional problems. Stability in the area, stronger economic links, and common security concerns might all result from such collaboration.⁶ China and Pakistan have a long history of strategic collaboration, which includes military and security cooperation. Regional stability and the need to counteract Indian influence are shared priorities of both states. China's strategic goal in investing in Pakistan's military capabilities, especially via CPEC, is to strengthen Pakistan's regional position. This collaboration has expanded into military realms, such as joint naval patrols and greater maritime coordination, which has further solidified the relationship. Gwadar Port is strategically important for more than just its strategic value; it might also be used for military reasons, giving Pakistan and China a stronger naval presence in the Indian Ocean. This new initiative is in line with a larger plan to protect trade routes and combat regional threats.⁷

Review of Relevant Literature

Pakistan and China first established diplomatic ties in the early 1960s, spurred by shared geopolitical goals, most notably the need to challenge India. According to the NUS Institute of South Asian Studies (2024), this cooperation has evolved from "friendly relations" into an "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership" throughout the years. Improving connectivity and increasing economic cooperation are the primary goals of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the backbone of Pakistan-China ties. With the launch of CPEC in 2013, China has poured a lot of money into Pakistan's energy, infrastructure, and manufacturing. Both the Global Times (2024) and the NUS Institute of South Asian Studies (2024)

agree that this project would help both Pakistan and China. It would improve infrastructure and ease Pakistan's energy shortages, while also giving China a key trade route and increasing its influence in South Asia.⁸ The two countries' military ties have grown closer as well, with China supplying Pakistan with advanced weaponry and technological know-how. An example of a joint venture that exemplifies this cooperation is the manufacture of JF-17 fighter aircraft. Joint military exercises and high-level defense conversations have also been conducted between the two nations in an effort to strengthen strategic cooperation (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). When it comes to fundamental matters, China and Pakistan are diplomatic allies. In the Kashmir conflict, China has Pakistan's backing, but in the Xinjiang, Taiwan, and Hong Kong crises, China has Pakistan's support. According to the NUS Institute of South Asian Studies (2024) and Global Times (2024), the foundation of this mutual support is the common value of non-interference and respect for sovereignty. The connection is robust, however there are obstacles in the relationship. Western media often portray CPEC as a "debt trap" for Pakistan; however, both countries deny this and highlight the developmental advantages of the projects. Extra dangers to the alliance come from security issues, especially those pertaining to terrorism in the area. Nevertheless, both nations have put measures in place to deal with these concerns and guarantee the security of Chinese workers in Pakistan (Global Times, 2024). Xi Jinping has presided over a flourishing of the Pakistan-China strategic alliance, which has been defined by extensive political, military, and commercial collaboration. As the two nations' strategic interests converge as they strive for common objectives of peace and prosperity in the

⁶ Jinping, President Xi. "Pak-China committed to work regional partners on open global economy: PM."

⁷ Ullah, Zakir, Areej Manzoor, Qammar Mahboob, and Song Zhihui. "The Strategic Importance of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Its Impact on Strategic Stability in South

Asia." *CARC Research in Social Sciences* 3, no. 3 (2024): 311-322.

⁸ Gul, Shereen. "An Appraisal of Sino-Pak Strategic and Economic Partnership in New Security Paradigm: Prospects & Challenges." *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 6, no. 2 (2023).

area, we may anticipate a further strengthening of our partnership.⁹

A Foundational Theory

The development of the strategic alliance between Pakistan and China under Xi Jinping may be better understood via the prism of Neorealism, often called Structural Realism, in the field of international affairs. There is no overarching authority to establish norms and order in the international system, according to Kenneth Waltz (1979), who explains this as an essential feature of Neorealism. Under this self-help system, states aim to maximize their relative strength vis-à-vis other states while they prioritize their survival. With Xi Jinping at the helm, the dynamic between China and Pakistan has taken on a new dimension as the two nations attempt to counterbalance regional and global powers, bolster national security, and deepen their economic and political ties. Where they stand strategically. Throughout history, Pakistan and China have been closely connected, with strong political, military, and economic relations dating back to the early 1950s. A shared desire to confront common enemies, including the US and India, has molded this alliance.¹⁰ Pakistan has always looked to China for assistance in countering India's rising regional dominance, particularly in the realms of military might and economic influence. Pakistan is an important ally of China's in South Asia, an area where America and India have considerable influence. These factors align harmoniously with Neorealism's focus on the interplay of power and the protection of national interests within a global system characterized by anarchy. The thesis argues that governments join alliances and partnerships for survival and security, not because they have similar ideologies. The changing regional power dynamics, especially with India strengthening its

alliances with Western nations like the US, Japan, and others, might be seen in this light as an explanation for the warming ties between Pakistan and China.¹¹

The strengthening of ties between China and Pakistan has been expedited by Xi Jinping's ascension to China's leadership in 2012. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), spearheaded by Xi Jinping's vision for China's global leadership, included the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as one of its prominent projects. The CPEC is a prime example of the strategic value of this alliance as it includes multibillion-dollar investments in Pakistani infrastructure, energy, and transportation projects. In China's larger strategy to increase its influence in South Asia and offset India's rising economic and military might, CPEC plays a pivotal role. Another strategically important aspect of CPEC is that it gives China access to the Arabian Sea via Pakistan's Gwadar Port, rather than through the Malacca Strait, a bottleneck in international maritime traffic.¹² This shift may be better understood through the lens of neorealism, which emphasizes China's need to protect its strategic and economic interests in a global marketplace that is highly competitive. China is bolstering its economic footing and geopolitical footing in South Asia by investing substantially in Pakistan, which in turn increases its total power position. With India's ongoing military expansion and deepening of links with the US, Pakistan has found a crucial counterbalance in its alliance with China under Xi Jinping. Neorealism highlights the rising influence of India as a fundamental issue for state action, and this concern directly threatens Pakistan's national security. For a long time, Pakistan has considered its relationship with China crucial to preserving power dynamics in South Asia. This is especially true in the realm of military affairs, since Pakistan has

⁹ Sehwat, Anjali. "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance and India-China Relations in Contemporary Geopolitics." (2023).

¹⁰ Abbasi, Rizwana. "Global Power Shift and Foreign Policy Choices for Pakistan." *Strategic Studies* 43, no. 1 (2023): 1-21.

¹¹ Fatima, Sahar, Mehar Amna, and Hina Saeed. "Pakistan Power Position under the influence of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: An Analysis of

Economic and Strategic Opportunities." *Annals of Human and Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2024): 86-98.

¹² Qian, Xuemei. "Structural factors of international relations that affect China-Pakistan Economic Corridor." In *The Political Economy of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor*, pp. 21-46. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2023.

relied heavily on Chinese modern armament equipment. To further solidify their defense cooperation, the two nations have also participated in strategic conversations and joint military drills. In line with Neorealism's claim that governments may strengthen their security via military alliances and strategic partnerships to discourage possible enemies, this element of the cooperation makes sense. As a means of external balancing, the military alliance between Pakistan and China allows Pakistan to resist India's rising influence by allying with China, a stronger state.¹³

The larger regional and global ramifications of the Pakistan-China alliance may be better understood via the lens of neorealism. In an effort to balance out American hegemony in the area, the two nations have cast their alliance in a cooperative light. China and Pakistan have grown closer as a result of the U.S. shift toward Asia, which is meant to limit China's ascent, and the strengthening of U.S.-Indian ties. Defense collaboration, nuclear accords, and joint military drills are all parts of the U.S.-India strategic alliance that China and Pakistan see as an attack on their interests. China and Pakistan have responded by working together more closely on defense, exchanging information, and bolstering regional security. This process is consistent with Neorealism's view of the ways in which nations balance each other out in the face of danger. Pakistan and China have formed a relationship to help each country safeguard its interests and strengthen its position in the world, which is becoming more competitive. Neorealism also places a premium on the economic side of the Pakistan-China relationship. Despite Neorealism's long-standing focus on military might, the ideology now acknowledges the value of economic might in protecting national interests. Financial ramifications for both nations are substantial due to

the CPEC's status as an element of China's larger BRI. Critical to Pakistan's economic growth and stability, CPEC has attracted large Chinese investments in energy and infrastructure projects.¹⁴ China views CPEC as a way to protect its economic interests via the opening of new trade channels and the expansion of its influence in strategic areas. Since CPEC has improved commercial and investment links for both Pakistan and China, it has further strengthened the strategic alliance between the two nations. According to Meersheimer (2001), neorealism sheds light on this facet of the relationship by demonstrating how nations may increase their influence and security in the international system via economic methods.¹⁵ Neorealism provides a useful framework for examining the development of the strategic relationship between Pakistan and China during the Xi Jinping period. Factors propelling the strengthening of connections between Pakistan and China include power, security, and the anarchic structure of the international system, all of which are emphasized in this thesis. Pakistan has become an important ally in China's ambitions to balance India and the US as a result of Xi Jinping's leadership, which has led to a more aggressive global role for China. As two nations vying for dominance in a global arena marked by rising tensions, Pakistan and China have shown their Neorealist ideology via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), military cooperation, and strategic alignment. Neorealist analysis of the Pakistan-China alliance reveals that, more than economic or ideological similarity, strategic concerns seeking to counter regional and global challenges are the driving forces behind this relationship.¹⁶

¹³ Iqbal, Khuram, Muhammad Shoaib, and Sardar Bakhsh. "Evolving dynamics of China-Pakistan counter-terrorism cooperation." *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* (2024): 1-17.

¹⁴ Biberman, Yelena, Jared Schwartz, and Farhan Zahid. "China's security strategy in Pakistan: Lessons for Washington." *Asian Security* 19, no. 1 (2023): 43-58.

¹⁵ Munir, Kishwar, and Waqas Iqbal. "Understanding Challenges to CPEC and the future of strategic alignment in South Asia." *Pakistan Political Science Review* 2, no. 1 (2023): 31-44.

¹⁶ Rasool, Ghulam, Shah Nawaz Mangi, Adeel Ahmed, and Faisal Charan. "Examining the Odyssey of China Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Historical Perspective." *Zhongguo Kuangye Daxue Xuebao* 29, no. 3 (2024): 117-129.

Approach to Research

According to "Strengthening Ties: The Evolution of the Pakistan-China Strategic Partnership in the Xi Jinping Era," a qualitative research approach was used to investigate all aspects of the complex relationship between China and Pakistan. They were able to fully grasp the geopolitical, economic, and strategic aspects of their collaboration because to this method. In order to provide a thorough and complete picture of the changing dynamics under Xi Jinping's leadership, a descriptive research approach was used. Research has relied on secondary sources, such as scholarly publications, official reports, policy evaluations, and other pertinent literature, to compile its data. This approach guaranteed a strong and varied data collection, which allowed the researchers to examine patterns, trends, and the wider consequences of the Pakistan-China strategic partnership. The study was able to harness previous research and ideas to build a complex narrative of the bilateral connection by relying on secondary data.¹⁷ Key changes, difficulties, and possibilities were highlighted via a comprehensive analysis of the strategic relationship made possible by the descriptive study design and qualitative approach. In order to make sense of the intricate Pakistan-China connection in the modern geopolitical setting, this method supplied a thorough contextual knowledge.¹⁸

Relations between Pakistan and China from a Strategic Perspective.

In pursuit of a peaceful neighborhood and Pakistan's socioeconomic growth, the country's foreign policy seeks to cultivate cordial and mutually beneficial connections with nations throughout the globe. Terrorism, fundamentalism, separatism, and climate change are just a few of the global problems that need a new way of working together. According to Munir (2018), these two-way collaborations might be anything from tactical

alliances to strategic partnerships. With the goal of peaceful coexistence as their guiding principle, Pakistan and China have coordinated their responses to pressing global and regional concerns. Their shared strategic vision extends to the realms of economics, security, and military. A contemporary Silk Road connecting China's economy with Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa is the goal of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an investment program worth billions of dollars. With a trillion dollars in investment, China is launching an effort that will affect 193 nations, which account for 40% of the world's GDP and 63% of the people. The Communist Party of China spent about \$120 billion on foreign investments between 2014 and 2017, as stated in the country's 2017 constitution.¹⁹

The Consequences for Pakistan's Geo-Strategic Position Relating to CPEC

There is a general consensus that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) would significantly impact Pakistan. China's goal of improved trade and economic linkages with other regions of the globe has been greatly aided by Pakistan's geostrategic position. There are many advantages to CPEC that Pakistan has reaped, but there are also many disadvantages. There are two competing stories concerning CPEC in Pakistan. There is a positive story that says CPEC would be good for the nation, and a negative one that says it will be worse, like the East India Company (Mollestad, 2019). The focus of this article is on CPEC's geostrategic significance to Pakistan via an analysis of its many geographical and strategic dimensions. It describes how Pakistan may take use of its strategic location to gain a lot from this economic corridor. The study underscores the political, cultural, and geopolitical components of CPEC, demonstrating that it is more than just a commerce corridor linking various regions of China and other nations. Because of its strategic

¹⁷ Kumar, Mr Ajay, and Sanjeev Kumar Bragta. "CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA: AN OVERVIEW."

¹⁸ Hussain, Israr, and Iqtidar Hussain. "New Dimensions of Sino-Pak Relations in the Context of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

(CPEC)." *Journal of Xi'an Shiyou University, Natural Science Edition* 19, no. 4 (2023): 864-880.

¹⁹ Abb, Pascal. "All geopolitics is local: the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor amidst overlapping centre–periphery relations." *Third World Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2023): 76-95.

position, it will also open up new commercial prospects for Pakistan (Ali, 2016)... The article goes on to say that CPEC would make Pakistan's military stronger, especially in comparison to India. It goes on to say that CPEC might cause problems for Pakistan, such problems for Indian domination and dangers to American interests in the area.²⁰

Pakistan is a major geopolitical center because to its position, which links the South, East, West, and Central Asian areas (CPEC Exploring the Geo-Strategic Dimension). The Central Asian Republics and resource- and hydrocarbon-rich Iran form one side, while the world's second-most populous nation, India, is on the other. Stronger than mountains, deeper than seas, and sweeter than honey is the ongoing friendship between China and Pakistan, which is bolstered by the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Iqbal et al., 2021). Economic linkage with a crucial geo-strategic component is created by CPEC, which connects South and East Asia. This aspect merits research. If this initiative is successful, it will encourage South and East Asian countries to work together in areas such as healthcare, education, commerce, culture, energy, infrastructure, and telecommunications (Shabbir et al., 2021). Along with China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Europe, CPEC and BRI might link many South Asian nations. Gwadar, a deep-sea port 600 km from the world's greatest oil chokepoint, the Strait of Hormuz, has just emerged, adding to Pakistan's geostrategic significance (Rasool, 2020). Based on exploratory and analytical methodologies used to primary and secondary data, this study shows that CPEC is changing Pakistan politically, socially, and economically. CPEC is the crown jewel of the Belt

and Road Initiative (BRI). One of the main goals of the research was to look at the geopolitical aspects of CPEC that had been ignored before.²¹ The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is of paramount significance because of Pakistan's advantageous geographical location in the area, as well as the geo-strategic paradigm of Gwadar. Important to this importance is the Gwadar Port, which is situated close to the Strait of Hormuz. Pakistan's economy is about to undergo a radical shift as a result of CPEC and Gwadar, becoming a new paradigm in the process. Gul et al. (2021) used SWOT analysis, qualitative descriptive technique, economic and geographical methodologies, and other tools to demonstrate Gwadar's geo-strategic importance. Examining how the developmental project raises Gwadar's profile is the main goal of this research. As a regional economic center and worldwide trade gateway, Gwadar is an important city in Pakistan. With better road connections and marine routes made possible by this deep-sea port's expansion, regional and economic cooperation has been strengthened (Afghan et al., 2022). Research confirms that CPEC is a massive mega-project with the potential to catapult Pakistan's economy into the stratosphere. Gwadar Port may enhance the naval presence of both Pakistan and China by allowing combined patrols in the Indian Ocean, which is beneficial for both countries' maritime interests in the area. Therefore, CPEC is seen as a driving force behind a sea shift in the economic landscape of Pakistan and other neighboring nations (Ahmad, 2019). In theory, CPEC is seen as a major economic driver for the area and a catalyst for a revolution in Pakistan's economy. Pakistan is on the brink of becoming one of the world's most alluring transit trade routes.²²

²⁰ Abb, Pascal. "All geopolitics is local: the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor amidst overlapping centre-periphery relations." *Third World Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2023): 76-95.

²¹ Haq, Ajaz Ul. "Exploring the China-Pakistan Educational, Cultural, and Bilateral Cooperation." *Essays and Perspectives on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Beyond* (2023): 177.

²² Shahzad, Naeem, Hafiza Rukhsana Khuram, Hamid Khan, Muhammad Jamshaid Bajwa, and Shahbaz Nawaz. "Opportunities and Challenges of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Cpec): A Game Changer in South Asian Countries and Impact of Cpec on Pakistani Economy." *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 7, no. 5 (2023): 860-879.

Controversies in Xi Jinping's China, the Belt and Road Initiative, and Baluchistan

With 70% coming from FDI, 25% from loans, and 5% from grants, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is following a worldwide trend toward sluggish growth. While the government is eager to fund the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), private businesses are wary of doing so (Khan, 2020). Russia, Mongolia, and Pakistan are among the recipient nations who are feeling the strain of China's debt sustainability and repayment conditions, which might put their sovereignty at risk (Abbas, 2019). Locals in Gwadar are upset because, despite assurances, no major developments have been set up there beyond a 19-kilometer road in Baluchistan. Ullah (2023) reports that while 60% of the territory is industrialized, 40% of Makran is still not part of the effort. Possible biases continue in Baluchistan, especially in the energy industry. Significant problems include thermal power plant slow transitions, line losses, and cyclic debt. In terms of development and infrastructure, Baluchistan stands much behind the rest of Pakistan. Lack of consultation and the perception of resource exploitation, including Reko Diq, Saindak, and natural gas, have created trust deficiencies, which in turn have made the local people and political leadership mostly adverse to the project (Abbas et al., 2019). Chinese investments under Xi Jinping's leadership have prioritized financial gain over human development, poverty alleviation, higher education, and human resource development; this is in contrast to the World Bank's economic policies, which have had a more substantial influence on Baluchistan. CPEC has not had a major impact on the province. Although 7500 MW of electricity were added to the national grid via CPEC, Baluchistan's energy industry has not been upgraded or comparable facilities have not been observed (Meo et al., 2019). Despite the fact that CPEC has opened up

²³ Imran, Muhammad, Fasiha Altaf, Muhammad Adnan Maqbool, Muhammad Umair Ashraf, Uzma Niaz, Gulnaz Akbar, Shahid Kalim Khan, and Fariha Sohail. "Transforming International Power Structure: A Reciprocal Analysis of China's Peripheral Diplomacy and South Asian Security Dilemma." *Migration Letters* 21, no. S9 (2024): 735-751.

commerce with neighboring countries, created jobs, and attracted private investment, Baluchistan is still mostly ignored, leading to heightened militancy and ethnic strife.²³

Regional Integration and the CPEC Malacca Problem

An opportunity for regional economic integration presents itself along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which would connect Pakistan's less developed regions to the country's major cities (Jaleel et al., 2019). In comparison to areas such as the European Union and ASEAN, Asia's level of political, social, and economic integration is far lower. Because of its fragmented nature, South Asia has been unable to reap the full benefits of regional and globalization initiatives. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) helps to link South and West Asia and South, Central, and East Asia together as a component of the larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Furthermore, China now has a way out of the Malacca Dilemma because to CPEC. According to Javed and Ismail (2021), former Chinese president Hu Jintao brought attention to the difficulties China had in the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait in 2003 while discussing international maritime commerce. The situation is further complicated for Chinese trade routes and the Indo-China competition is heating up as the Malacca Strait is being watched by the Indian Navy while China has physical control of the South China Sea. We call this problem the "Malacca Dilemma." China gets more than half of its crude oil from the Middle East and Africa; CPEC provides the quickest route to these regions. As a result, CPEC helps alleviate the Malacca Dilemma and acts as a strategic buffer for China against disturbances in the South China Sea. In addition, CPEC strengthens China's position in the IOR, where it stands in relation to the US and India.²⁴

²⁴ Fayyaz, Shabana. "CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR: PAKISTAN'S GEOPOLITICAL STANDING BETWEEN THE US AND CHINA." *Grassroots* (17260396) 57, no. 1 (2023).

3.1 The Xi Jinping Era's Strategic Goals for Pakistan and China

From Asia to Europe, China plans to increase its political and economic might worldwide, especially in areas where the United States and the European Union already have a stranglehold. The Silk Road, maritime channels, and land corridors in CPEC and BRI are all part of China's strategy to boost economic development via strategic ties, which aims to secure sea routes and lessen reliance on marine chokepoints. According to Ahmed et al. (2022), the BRI focuses on building roads, trains, and other infrastructure but does not provide funds for improving universities or human resources. A soft approach in international politics, highlighting the rule of law and the ideology of the Communist Party of China, is what Xi Jinping stresses when handling topics like climate change, global conflicts, world commerce, and technology. According to Gul et al. (2022), he thinks that China may become a new global power by implementing economic reforms and implementing tight party rule. He also supports global unity and cooperation. Xi Jinping's One Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) helps build infrastructure and boosts consumer spending, which benefits more over one billion people. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) contributed 40% to China's economic growth in 2017, which totaled \$12.238 trillion. Xi Jinping's strategic vision is embodied by the BRI and CPEC, which include 900 projects and investments totaling \$1.9 trillion with 15 major partners. According to Bencivelli and Tonelli (2020), Pakistan and its neighbors are geopolitically significant, and his foreign policy in the 21st century, especially in the Indo-Pacific and Africa, highlights this fact. In response to India's alliances with ASEAN and the Quad, China is aiming to exert its supremacy in the South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, and the Indian Ocean by expanding CPEC to Afghanistan and increasing its influence in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. The policies of Xi Jinping show that he is taking a practical response to these problems (Parveen & Shah, 2021). According to President Xi, China's commerce has reached a "new normal" and the

country's GDP growth has been consistent. Inspired by the historic maritime Silk Road, the BRI was launched in 2013 with the goal of linking global China via investments in infrastructure and funds. Restoring diplomatic connections, including those between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and establishing allies throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America are all part of Xi's geopolitical agenda, even if BRI funding fell to \$28.4 billion in the first half of 2022. In an effort to undermine the liberal democratic system, China is pursuing the objective of forming a massive bloc unified by economic and geopolitical interests.²⁵

Beijing Declaration on the Belt and Road Initiative and President Xi Jinping's Strategy

As world leaders vie with China's One Belt & One Road (BRI) program, the balance of power is changing on a global scale. Western officials have been trying to discredit the BRI and its strategic significance since its start in 2013 by waging a fifth-generation hybrid war, which has only served to further muddle matters and incite further disputes. Regardless, according to a study in August 2023 by the Economist London, the BRI has had a tremendous effect, creating 420,000 employment and rescuing 40 million people from poverty in its member nations over the last decade (Wu, 2018). After the BRI is finished, it could cut travel times along economic corridors by 12%, boost trade by 2.7% to 9.7%, enhance incomes by up to 3.4%, and save 7.6 million people from severe poverty, according to the World Bank. In addition, China has signed agreements with international organizations to assist environmental protection, and it has emphasized encouraging low-carbon and green growth within the BRI framework (Bencivelli & Tonelli, 2020). With the help of public-private partnerships (PPPs), commercial banks, and government policy banks, China is pouring an estimated US\$8 trillion into countries throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Pakistan, Laos, Thailand, Brunei, Myanmar, Mongolia, and Russia are among the nations that have economic corridors set up by China under the

²⁵ Akhtar, Nasreen, and Dilshad Bano. "China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Explaining US-India

Strategic Concerns." *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 2, no. 4 (2021): 637-649.

BRI. China has been the top foreign investor in the last decade, with foreign direct investment (FDI) increasing from \$82 billion in 2012 to \$154 billion in 2020 (Deng, 2021). The country has inked MOUs with 152 nations and 32 international organizations.²⁶

Amid rising geopolitical tensions, world leaders convened at the G20 Annual Summit in New Delhi to unveil a new economic corridor that would link Europe, the Middle East, and India in an effort to compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). A full member of the G20, the African Union, is an indication of this plan to counteract China's influence in Africa (Torres, 2019). In an attempt to undermine the BRI, US President Joe Biden has been promoting the United States as a viable alternative partner for developing nations, with an emphasis on transparency, inclusivity, modernity, and quality industrialization. In an effort to promote renewable energy and connectivity, the recently planned corridor seeks to link ports across continents (Akhter, 2022). The deal's approval by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi exemplifies India's geopolitical aspirations. To ease energy and commercial flows from the Gulf to Europe, the corridor intends to link Middle Eastern nations by train and connect them to India via port. Nevertheless, this goal cannot be attained without enough resources, political stability, and human capital (Wang, & Yi, 2021). With over 150 nations now linked, the BRI is a perfect platform for international communication. A major geopolitical and geostrategic change in US-India strategy has occurred with the new corridor, notwithstanding India's worries and propaganda against the BRI and CPEC. Pakistan, Iran, and CPEC may be marginalized as a result of this new pact, which began with the establishment of the I2U2 forum by the US, India, UAE, and Israel.

Will Xi Jinping Use the BRI to Militarize It?

Under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), more than 200 cooperation papers pertaining to

cooperative infrastructure projects with other nations and international organizations were signed by the end of 2022. The grand goal of this strategy is to construct infrastructure all over the world, linking China to its trade partners and enhancing bilateral ties. Global governance and international development find a new platform in the BRI (Dunford, 2021). But the United States and its allies are still wary of China's motives, worried that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) debt trap diplomacy may stifle chances for China to increase its economic, strategic, and geopolitical influence. Some worry this would give China an advantage in reshaping regional and international power dynamics. In spite of these reservations, a number of UN-affiliated international organizations have linked up with BRI initiatives and are actively involved (Teer et al., 2021). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) depicts a realist paradigm, with Xi Jinping at the helm, and it represents China's governmental goals in projecting its authority via international economic and commercial channels. For Xi, advocated for a more practical, people-to-people approach to diplomacy while stressing the need of following the rule of law internationally. To combat current hegemonic influences and sabotage attempts, China is focused on development projects like CPEC and BRI rather than engaging in direct confrontations. This strategy intends to promote global cooperation and development.²⁷

The Potential of China's Belt and Road Initiative on Relations Between Pakistan and Iran Under Xi Jinping's Leadership

The "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" and the Belt and Road Initiative were instrumental in the recent \$400 billion agreement between China and Iran. Pakistan now has a chance to deepen its connections with Iran thanks to this historic accord. Pakistan and Iran share a border, but their ties have been strained because of their divergent regional goals. Key issues between the two neighboring

²⁶ Ali, Iftkhar, Imran Ali Noonari, and Pervaiz Ali Mahesar. "UNDERSTANDING PAK-CHINA RELATIONS THROUGH CPEC: GEOSTRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH ASIA."

²⁷ Javaid, Umbreen, and Rameesha Javaid. "Strengthening geo-strategic bond of Pakistan and China through geo-economic configuration." *Pakistan Economic and Social Review* 54, no. 1 (2016): 123-142.

nations have been Iran's economic ties with India and Pakistan's strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, Pakistan and Iran may be able to work together in the future due to changes in regional dynamics and China's increased global influence (Mangi et al., 2021). Projects such as the Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (CPEC), which was originally estimated to be worth \$46 billion and is projected to increase to \$65 billion, demonstrate China's heavy involvement in its Belt and Road Initiative. USD 62.2 billion. Chinese investment in Iran has the ability to revive the long-delayed Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline, turning it into an Iran-Pakistan-China Gas Pipeline. This may be a great boon to China's energy industry, which is in dire need of reliable energy supplies. The two ports of Gawadar and Chabahar are just 72 kilometers away, and both countries are eager to connect them. According to Rizwanullah (2020), these efforts have the potential to enhance cooperation in border security and promote economic cooperation between the two countries.²⁸

When it comes to economics, Iran is feeling the effects of the US's "maximum pressure campaign," while Pakistan is worried about regional security and US meddling, especially in light of India's growing strategic relations with the US. The new China-Iran accord and India's withdrawal from several Iranian projects may have a beneficial effect on trilateral collaboration among Iran, Pakistan, and China. The fact that Iran and Pakistan are both unhappy with US policy opens the door for them to work together with China (Ahsan, 2021). Pakistan and Iran, both of whom are feeling the heat from China, would benefit from strengthening their connections in order to more effectively handle domestic problems and work together on regional strategies. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a key regional and transnational initiative for China's Belt and Road Initiative. Investigating potential synergies between CPEC and China's \$400 billion investment in Iran is of the utmost importance,

given that China intends to spend \$400 billion in Iran. As a result, the long-standing relationship between the two countries might be recast as a "Pak-China-Iran trilateral partnership."²⁹

Conclusion

Xi Jinping's leadership has brought about substantial changes in Pakistan and China's strategic relationship, highlighting a strengthening partnership defined by extensive collaboration in a wide range of areas. Projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have strengthened this multi-faceted relationship, which includes economic, military, and geopolitical aspects. The BRI, of which CPEC is a component, is pivotal to the alliance between China and Pakistan. Both the regional economy and Pakistan's economic environment stand to benefit from this initiative's proposed changes. Pakistan will be better connected to the world economy and trade routes connecting China to Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa would be facilitated by the massive infrastructure development that is CPEC. This development includes energy projects, roadways, and trains. It is clear that these efforts are of strategic significance to Beijing, as seen by the massive expenditure of approximately \$120 billion worldwide between 2014 and 2017. It is possible that CPEC would shift the game for Pakistan. Thanks to its strategic position, it is an essential part of China's plan to increase trade and economic integration. Particularly noteworthy is the construction of Gwadar Port, which is located close to the Strait of Hormuz. Gwadar, a deep-sea port, has great potential to become an important trading post for countries across the world and an integral part of China's plan to avoid the Malacca Strait, which would solve the "Malacca Dilemma." However, there are obstacles to overcome in the way of the CPEC project. One side of Pakistan is bullish on the economic prospects, while the other side is worried about a recurrence of past abuses. It

²⁸ Gul, Shubnam, M. F. Asghar, and M. Khalid. "Shifting National Security Paradigm of Pakistan from Geo Politics to a Geo Economics Era." *Global Economics Review*, VI (2021).

²⁹ Gul, S., W. Ishaque, and M. F. Asghar. "Impact of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on National and Integration in Pakistan Impact of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on National Development." (2021).

is crucial to resolve local problems and spread the advantages of CPEC fairly, as these concerns show.

The strategic alignment between China and Pakistan goes beyond economic cooperation and encompasses military and security as well. Regional stability and the need to counteract Indian influence are shared priorities of both states. China's strategic goal in investing in Pakistan's military capabilities, especially via CPEC, is to strengthen Pakistan's regional position. This collaboration has expanded into military realms, such as joint naval patrols and greater maritime coordination, which has further solidified the relationship. Gwadar Port is strategically important for more than just its strategic value; it might also be used for military reasons, giving Pakistan and China a stronger naval presence in the Indian Ocean. This new initiative is in line with a larger plan to protect trade routes and combat regional threats. The geostrategic significance of CPEC is immense. Along with its practical use as a commerce route, it also has important cultural and political implications. Economic connection with a key geo-strategic component is fostered by CPEC by connecting South Asia with East Asia and beyond. If this effort is successful, South and East Asian countries may work together more closely in areas including energy, health, commerce, and education. The corridor's possible ties to Iran and its expansion into Afghanistan further emphasize its regional significance. Achieving greater economic connectivity and influence throughout Asia and Europe is a goal of China's, and its growth is a reflection of that desire. If these trends continue, China may come to dominate regional geopolitics and tip the scales of power in its favor. The strategic advantages of CPEC are clear, but the project has had its share of problems, especially in Baluchistan and other affected areas. Resistance and heightened insurgency have resulted from the sluggish advancement of certain projects, as well as from local complaints over the exploitation of resources and the absence of consultation. More inclusive development policies are needed since tensions have been heightened by the gap between infrastructure spending and the benefits actually received by local residents. Problems with CPEC's smooth execution also arise from the geopolitical

priorities of other world countries, including India and the US. In addition to being an economic initiative, CPEC has become a focal point of strategic conflict due to the region's geopolitical rivalries. China and Pakistan have formed a strategic relationship under Xi Jinping's leadership, and this has far-reaching consequences for more than just their bilateral ties. Part of China's plan to increase its worldwide influence via economic diplomacy and infrastructural development is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). For economic security and to lessen reliance on marine chokepoints, China is investing in infrastructure and developing alternative trade routes. In addition, India's partnerships with other regional countries and projects, such as the US-India-Middle East-Europe Corridor, are offset by the strategic alignment between Pakistan and China. Given China's larger ambition to exert its influence in the Indian Ocean and beyond, Pakistan plays a crucial role in this geopolitical dynamic.

Opportunities for improved regional collaboration have been brought to light by the changing dynamics of the Pakistan-China relationship. A realistic attitude to regional concerns is shown by the prospective incorporation of Iran into the BRI framework via efforts like the Iran-Pakistan-China Gas Pipeline. The region's stability, economic connections, and shared security threats might all be alleviated by such collaboration. Finally, under Xi Jinping's leadership, China and Pakistan have formed a complex strategic alliance with important geopolitical, economic, and military components. Opportunities and difficulties are presented by the BRI and CPEC, which are fundamental to this connection. Pakistan and China may enhance their collaboration and have a positive impact on the peace and prosperity of the area by resolving local concerns, promoting inclusive development, and negotiating regional geopolitical dynamics. A great deal will depend on how this connection develops further; it will determine how South Asia and the world are shaped politically in the future.

Ideas suggested

Take an active role in involving local populations, especially in areas like Baluchistan, to address their concerns and share benefits fairly. Open and honest

discussion of the project's objectives, advantages, and possible consequences is an important part of this. Ensure that local communities may actively engage and profit from the economic possibilities generated by CPEC by investing in capacity building via education, vocational training, and infrastructure development. In order to safeguard the CPEC infrastructure against insurgent assaults and regional wars, it is imperative that Pakistan and China enhance their security collaboration. Among these measures include the enhancement of local police forces' capabilities, the exchange of information, and coordinated security operations. Involve local people in security and stability maintenance via community-based security programs; this will help build confidence and collaboration between local communities and the state. Invest in areas such as healthcare, technology, education, and human resource development in addition to infrastructure. As a result, the model for economic development will be more comprehensive and long-lasting. Promote public-private partnerships to increase efficiency and creativity by using private sector funding and knowledge in a variety of initiatives. Reduce the negative effects on the environment caused by massive infrastructure projects by using sustainable development techniques. Part of this process involves safeguarding biodiversity and natural resources and doing comprehensive environmental impact assessments. Prompt the Chinese firms working on CPEC to implement robust CSR policies that improve the lives of locals by bolstering their economies, protecting the environment, and helping those in need. Incorporate CPEC with other regional projects and form alliances with neighboring nations like Iran and Afghanistan to strengthen regional cooperation. Economic integration and regional connections will be improved. Take the initiative in diplomatic endeavors to defuse geopolitical tensions and cultivate an atmosphere of cooperation in the area. To make sure CPEC is seen as a positive initiative for economic growth and regional stability, not a cause of war, this involves talking to big nations like India and the US.

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