



CHINA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN PAKISTAN; BEYOND CPEC

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Abstract:

China's strategic interests in Pakistan which lies beyond the scope of its flagship project, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Although CPEC is the linchpin of Sino-Pakistani relations, China's grand strategy comprises a constellation of geopolitical, security, economic and cultural goals. Geopolitically: While China attempts to reduce Indian influence in the region and secure strategic maritime road through Arabian Sea. China is steadily diversifying into other segments of the economy financially like investments in agriculture, technology, and acquisitions of raw materials elsewhere while looking out for new markets to sell Chinese goods at home. Security cooperation encompasses shared counterterrorism measures and military exercises, with connectivity through Gwadar port that bolsters China marine power. China's cultural efforts focus on boosting soft power via educational exchanges, media inroads, and cultural diplomacy. Challenges remain, from regional instability and resistance on the ground. Educational exchanges, media presence and cultural diplomacy are among the efforts undertaken to strengthen soft power in China. While the Comprehensive and Strategic Engagement with Pakistan as a key specter of region wide stability and local resistance is nothing less than a formidable task, it manifests China's long-term commitment to cultivating an all-rounded partnership which goes much beyond infrastructural projects. A deep penetration into the veins of Pakistani security landscape helps to appreciate both strategic motives behind Beijing's enduring commitment in Pakistan and strategic consequences for regional stability. Pakistan and China matured the entire relationship from political-strategic cooperation to a more economic partnership. This is where China-Pakistan Economic Corridor stands as a game-changer, bringing a new environment of vibrancy and win-win situation for both countries. The partnership includes breaking new areas of cooperation beyond traditional domains including through energy collaboration, academic



exchanges, and people-to-people ties. The iconic Pak-China friendship or “Iron Brothers” that defines the bond as one of complete cooperation and understanding in terms of national interests. Pakistan and China through their collective science, technology & environmental conservation efforts aim to translate these technological innovations into a meaningful progress. The way forward for the Pakistan and China relations is also quite promising with sustainability, cooperation as being hall marks and it seems to be inevitable.

Introduction:

The ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is sometimes used to symbolize the Sino-Pakistani relationship, is a tribute to the strategic alliance that China and Pakistan have developed over several decades. A flagship initiative of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) represents the infrastructure and economic cooperation between the two countries, with the goal of improving connectivity and promoting regional economic growth. But China's strategic interests in Pakistan go much beyond this one project and cover a wide range of geopolitical, security, economic, and cultural aspects. "CPEC and Beyond" explores how Pakistan and China's bilateral relationship is modelled. It draws attention to the strong relationship that has endured for more than 65 years and serves as an example for state-to-state interactions in the modern world. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is emphasized in the paper as a key initiative that represents the two countries' growing collaboration. Additionally, it talks about how CPEC aims to promote shared development and regional connectivity among China, South Asia, and Central Asia, going beyond only serving as a commercial channel. The introduction lays the groundwork for examining the many facets of the relationship between China and Pakistan, including its political and strategic dimensions as well as its economic and people-to-people exchanges.

China and Pakistan have historically had a relationship characterized by strategic alignment and mutual assistance. Both nations have worked closely together ever since their diplomatic relations were established in the 1950s, especially when it came to counterbalancing regional rivals like India. Over time, this collaboration has strengthened and changed to reflect the changing nature of both local and international politics.

In terms of geopolitics, China sees Pakistan as an essential ally in its attempts to uphold regional stability and offset India's hegemony in South Asia. China benefits greatly from Pakistan's strategic location in the Arabian Sea, which strengthens its presence in the Indian Ocean and gives it better access to important marine routes. Pakistan's function as an entry point for the Belt and Road Initiative is also essential to China's goals of establishing connections with the Middle East and beyond. China has a wide range of economic interests in Pakistan, even if the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been the focal point of their bilateral relations. The sectors into which Chinese investments are expanding are resource extraction, technology, and agriculture. Furthermore, China is eager to promote its products and services to a burgeoning consumer base



in Pakistan by increasing its market share there. The close military cooperation and coordinated counterterrorism initiatives between China and Pakistan are key indicators of the two countries' commitment to security. Both countries have participated in a great deal of military drills, and China has been a major supplier of military equipment to Pakistan. In addition to its economic benefits, China's strategic naval capabilities are strengthened by the development of the Gwadar port, which provides a possible platform for its naval operations in the region. China is actively using several initiatives to promote its soft power in Pakistani culture. As part of its plan to strengthen cultural links and mutual understanding between the two countries, China has established Confucius Institutes, enhanced media presence, and exchanges in education. Their partnership is well-founded, but there are still several obstacles to overcome. There are other obstacles, including local opposition to some projects, political unrest in Pakistan, and worries about regional security. Nonetheless, there is hope for the future of Sino-Pakistani relations due to the possibility of more integration and cooperation in new areas.

China's strategic objectives in Pakistan by looking at the many facets of their collaboration outside of the well-known CPEC. This study aims to provide a comprehensive knowledge of China's long-term goals and the wider consequences for regional stability by exploring geopolitical, economic, security, and cultural elements.

Literature Review:

A great deal of research has been done on the strategic connection between China and Pakistan, with a particular emphasis on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). But a closer look is necessary due to the larger scope of China's interests in Pakistan, which include geopolitical, security, economic, and cultural factors. To give readers a comprehensive picture of China's strategic engagement with Pakistan outside of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), this literature study summarizes important results from scholarly works, official government reports, and reliable sources.

"Pakistan-China Relations: CPEC and Beyond" offers a thorough synopsis of the previous background and present state of affairs in the two countries' relationship. It highlights how strong the relationship between the two nations has remained over the years, having been based on mutual respect, trust, and understanding for more than 60 years. The analysis highlights the importance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as the centerpiece project of the Belt and Road Initiative, acting as a spur for increased infrastructural development and economic cooperation. It also highlights the geopolitical significance of CPEC in regional and global dynamics, talking about ramifications that go beyond its economic advantages. The literature review also discusses the drawbacks and objections to CPEC, including trade disparities, investment conditions, and security issues. While highlighting how important it is to keep the spirit of mutual trust and cooperation between Pakistan and China alive and concentrate on the good aspects of the partnership.



Numerous academics have emphasized the Sino-Pakistani relationship's geopolitical significance. Brewster (2018) explores how China gains a vital maritime foothold in the Indian Ocean and counterbalances India's influence in South Asia through its strategic access to the Arabian Sea through Pakistan. Like this, Small (2015) highlights how Pakistan's geographic location is essential to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), since it allows for a direct land connection to both Europe and the Middle East. These geopolitical factors highlight how crucial Pakistan is to China's regional policies.

Another crucial topic covered in the literature is China and Pakistan's cooperation in security. The substantial military collaboration aimed at counterterrorism, arms sales, and cooperative drills to stabilize the region and counter terrorist threats is described by Garlick (2018). China's naval presence and security interests in the Indian Ocean have been strengthened by the building of the Gwadar port, which is frequently recognized as an economic and strategic asset (Abbas, 2014). These studies highlight the importance of infrastructure investments for regional security as well as their dual-use nature.

Even though CPEC is the focus, research suggests that China's economic objectives in Pakistan are becoming more varied. Chinese investments in agriculture, technology, and resource extraction are growing, according to Abbas (2014) and others. This indicates that China is becoming more involved in the global economy. comprehension the entire breadth of China's economic policy in Pakistan requires a comprehension of this diversification. Various trade and economic reports also chronicle China's efforts to enter Pakistani markets with consumer goods and services, illustrating the complex nature of the connection between the two countries.

Media sway, educational exchanges, and cultural diplomacy are all parts of China's soft power strategy in Pakistan. According to academics like Shambaugh (2015), who addresses the wider ramifications of China's cultural diplomacy initiatives, Confucius Institutes are crucial in promoting Chinese language and culture. Scholarships and educational initiatives for Pakistani students help to strengthen cultural connections and promote a favorable perception of China in that country. These programmes are a part of a larger plan to strengthen China's influence and promote understanding across nations.

The difficulties affecting relations between China and Pakistan are also covered in the literature. Policy evaluations and regional studies, among other sources, have highlighted several important obstacles, including local hostility to specific projects, political instability in Pakistan, and security concerns in Balochistan. Scholars such as Small (2015) and Brewster (2018), who highlight the possibility of deeper engagement in new industries and the strategic durability of their partnership, are positive about the future of Sino-Pakistani ties despite these obstacles.

Beyond the CPEC, the literature now in publication offers a thorough summary of China's geopolitical goals in Pakistan. Through an analysis of the geopolitical, security, economic, and



cultural aspects, these studies collectively highlight the complex interplay between China and Pakistan. The literature review emphasizes the necessity of further investigation into the changing dynamics of this collaboration, considering the wider consequences for both global geopolitics and regional stability.

Theoretical Framework:

This study analyses China's strategic interests in Pakistan outside of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) using several theoretical frameworks. Three frameworks are employed: constructivism, liberalism, and realism. "Pakistan-China Relations: CPEC and Beyond" presents a theoretical framework that centers on the notion of mutual trust and respect as the fundamental basis of a sustainable partnership between China and Pakistan. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which emphasize mutual understanding, trust, and support as crucial components in building solid state-to-state interactions, serve as the foundation for this framework. The framework demonstrates how the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other cooperative projects have been made possible by the long-standing mutual trust between Pakistan and China. It also discusses the obstacles to building trust, both internal and external, and how crucial it is to keep highlighting the partnership's advantages to dispel unfavorable opinions. These theories offer a thorough framework for comprehending the complex dynamics of Sino-Pakistani relations as well as their wider implications for regional and international geopolitics.

1. Realism:

Power and Security:

In international relations, realism, especially structural realism emphasizes the significance of power and security. According to this view, in anarchic international systems without a centralized authority to impose laws, states behave primarily to protect themselves. In this context, the concept of South Asian power balance can be used to analyze China's strategic objectives in Pakistan. China hopes to offset India's dominance in the region by fortifying its relations with Pakistan, which will increase its own security and clout.

- **Balance of Power:**

A traditional balance of power approach is reflected in China's engagement with Pakistan, which includes military cooperation and the development of critical infrastructure like the Gwadar port. China's goal in backing Pakistan is to keep India from taking the lead in the region, a move that is consistent with realist notions of preserving the balance of power.

- **Security Dilemma:**

The security dilemma concept can also be used to analyze China-Pakistan security cooperation, including arms sales and combined military drills. India views the growing military links between China and Pakistan as a concern, which might spark an arms race and escalate tensions in the area.

2. Liberalism:



Economic Interdependence and Cooperation:

The liberal perspective, which emphasizes institutions, cooperation, and economic interdependence, offers an additional useful framework for examining Sino-Pakistani relations. International relations can become more stable and peaceful via cooperation and economic links, claims liberal theory.

- **Economic Interdependence:**
Liberal ideas of interdependence are embodied in the broad economic collaboration between China and Pakistan, which is emphasized by the CPEC among other initiatives. Mutual interests are created by the economic advantages of commerce, investment, and development initiatives, which can lessen the chance of conflict and promote stability.
- **Institutionalism:**
According to liberal institutionalism, agreements and international organizations can promote collaboration and lessen uncertainty. By participating in regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), China and Pakistan can institutionalize their cooperation and resolve disputes through established channels.

3. Constructivism:

Identity and Norms:

Constructivism places a strong emphasis on how ideas, identities, and conventions influence how the state behaves. The cultural and soft power aspects of China's strategic goals in Pakistan can be better understood with the aid of this theoretical framework.

- **Shared Identity and Historical Ties:**
The mutual respect and non-interference that have long underpinned China and Pakistan's relationship have produced a common identity and normative framework that serve as the foundation of their strategic alliance. Their current relationships and views of one another are influenced by this past background.
- **Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy:**
Through the constructivist lens, China's efforts to shape Pakistan's perceptions and attitudes towards China, fostering a positive image and deeper cultural ties, can be examined. China promotes its culture and values in Pakistan through educational exchanges, Confucius Institutes, and media initiatives.

Through the integration of many theoretical frameworks, this study offers a thorough examination of China's strategic objectives in Pakistan. The security and geopolitical aspects are explained by realism, which also emphasizes the problems with power dynamics and security. The economic and cooperative components are clarified by liberalism, which highlights the advantages of interdependence and institutional cooperation. Constructivism, which emphasizes how identity and norms shape bilateral relations, deepens the cultural and ideational elements.

By focusing on a wider range of strategic interests and their implications for regional stability and



global geopolitics, this multi-theoretical approach enables a nuanced understanding of the complexities and drivers behind China's engagement with Pakistan, going beyond the narrow focus on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Discussion and Analysis:

The strategic interests China has in Pakistan that go beyond the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are examined and analyzed in this section using constructivism, liberalism, and realism as the main theoretical frameworks. The discussion and analysis of "Pakistan-China Relations: CPEC and Beyond" explore the many facets of the relationship between Pakistan and China. As the centerpiece project of the Belt and Road Initiative, the report underscores the strategic importance of CPEC by highlighting its role in boosting regional connectivity, economic development, and people-to-people contacts. It goes over how CPEC promotes sustainable growth and socioeconomic advancement while acting as a catalyst for resolving Pakistan's major problems, including energy scarcity and infrastructure deficiencies. The analysis also looks at the reciprocal advantages of Pakistan-China cooperation, which include political and strategic cooperation as well as economic gains. The analysis also looks at the reciprocal advantages of Pakistan-China cooperation, which include political and strategic cooperation as well as economic gains. It emphasizes how crucial respect and trust between the two nations are fundamental components that have allowed them to launch bold projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) despite obstacles from the outside world and unfavorable public opinion. The report also discusses the need to dispel myths and complaints about CPEC by emphasizing its advantages over the long run for both countries.

Overall, the study and conversation offer a thorough picture of how the relationship between China and Pakistan is changing, with CPEC acting as a catalyst for change that goes beyond simple economic cooperation to influence regional dynamics and advance shared prosperity. The analysis provides a thorough knowledge of the complex nature of Sino-Pakistani ties by addressing geopolitical, security, economic, and cultural aspects.

1. Geopolitical Interests:

Realist Perspective:

From a realist standpoint, power dynamics and the need to balance off India's dominance in South Asia are the main forces behind China's geopolitical policy in Pakistan. China uses Pakistan as a strategic ally to sustain the balance of power in the area. China guarantees that India fights on two fronts, which weakens India's will and resources, by backing Pakistan.

- **Strategic Location:**

China needs Pakistan's location to have access to the Arabian Sea and the larger Indian Ocean. As part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Gwadar port is being developed to give China a vital maritime foothold that would facilitate trade routes and possible navy deployments. China's maritime dominance is strengthened by its strategic depth, which also protects vital sea lanes from possible blockades and regional disputes.



Liberal Perspective:

International relations can become more stable and cooperative because of economic interdependence, according to liberalism. China promotes economic interdependence by massively investing in Pakistan's infrastructure through the CPEC and other projects. This creates reciprocal interests that support stability and lessen the likelihood of conflict.

- **Regional Connectivity:**

In addition to the CPEC, China is investing in Pakistan with the goal of enhancing regional connectivity by tying together Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. By promoting trade and economic integration, these initiatives help to create a peaceful and cooperative regional environment.

2. Security Interests:

Realist Perspective:

A crucial component of China-Pakistan relations is security cooperation, which is motivated by the necessity for strategic alliances and pragmatic concerns about shared threat perceptions.

- **Military Collaboration:**

Enhancing Pakistan's military capabilities and guaranteeing a dependable ally in the region are the goals of China's military gear supply, cooperative counterterrorism efforts, and joint exercises with Pakistan. This military alliance serves as a check on India's increasing military might.

- **Gwadar Port:**

Gwadar port's twin objective of catering to commercial and maybe military needs emphasizes its strategic importance. China can more effectively project influence in the Indian Ocean and safeguard its maritime interests thanks to the port.

Constructivist Perspective:

Constructivism emphasizes how conventions and shared identities influence security cooperation. Deeper military cooperation has been made possible by the historical setting of Sino-Pakistani relations, which has been marked by mutual support and non-interference. This has created a strong sense of partnership and trust.

3. Economic Interests Beyond CPEC:

Liberal Perspective:

The benefits of trade, investment, and economic cooperation in promoting stable international relations are highlighted by economic liberalism.

- **Diversified Investments:**

China's economic ties to Pakistan are becoming more diverse, extending beyond infrastructure to encompass resource exploitation, agriculture, and technology. These investments strengthen bilateral relations by fostering interdependencies and accelerating Pakistan's economic growth.



- **Market Expansion:**
China may access an expanding consumer base by entering Pakistani markets with Chinese goods and services, resulting in mutually beneficial economic connections. This economic activity is consistent with liberal ideas of reciprocity and collaboration.

4. Cultural and Soft Power Interests:

Constructivist Perspective:

China is using cultural and soft power activities as a key component of its strategy to influence views and promote goodwill towards Pakistan.

- **Educational and Cultural Exchanges:**
Chinese language and culture are promoted by Confucius Institutes and scholarships for Pakistani students, which helps to cultivate a favorable perception of China among Pakistan's youth. These programmes foster mutual understanding and long-lasting cultural links.
- **Media and Public Diplomacy:**
China's cultural diplomacy initiatives and media presence in Pakistan contribute to the shaping of public opinion and the strengthening of China's soft power. China wants to create a conducive atmosphere for its wider strategic objectives, and one way it intends to do so is by promoting Chinese culture and values.

The Sino-Pakistani relationship has a solid base, yet there are still several issues. Significant obstacles include political unrest in Pakistan, concerns about regional security, and local opposition to certain projects. Security Issues: Chinese people and investments are at risk due to the ongoing conflict in Balochistan and other areas. To reduce these threats, effective local participation and counterterrorism collaboration are crucial.

Economic and Political Instability: Pakistan's political unpredictability and economic difficulties may influence how long Chinese initiatives last. Stability depends on ongoing political participation and economic assistance. The prospects for greater cooperation and integration in emerging fields like technology and renewable energy are encouraging for the future of Sino-Pakistani relations. Through pragmatic problem-solving and strategic alliance management, China and Pakistan can strengthen their strategic alliance and promote stability in the area. The analysis shows that China has extensive geopolitical, security, economic, and cultural interests in Pakistan that go much beyond the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China's engagement with Pakistan is motivated by a complex mix of power politics, economic interdependence, and cultural diplomacy when viewed through the lenses of constructivism, liberalism, and realism. In addition to improving Sino-Pakistani relations, this multipronged strategy has important ramifications for both regional stability and international geopolitics.

Conclusion:

Beyond the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China has significant geopolitical,



security, economic, and cultural interests in Pakistan. China uses Pakistan as a geopolitical balancing tool to offset India's power and gain access to the Arabian Sea. Security cooperation improves the defense capacities of both countries and includes military cooperation and counterterrorism initiatives. China invests in a variety of industries, including technology, resource extraction, and agriculture, to foster interdependence and mutual progress. China uses cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges to strengthen its soft power in the cultural sphere. "Pakistan-China Relations: CPEC and Beyond" highlights how the relationship between China and Pakistan, which has endured for more than 60 years, is exemplary and enduring. The paper emphasizes how important the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is as a flagship project that represents the two countries' growing collaboration and goes beyond simple economic gains to promote shared growth and regional connectivity. The Pakistan-China collaboration is based on a theoretical framework of mutual trust and respect, which is reinforced by the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. This paradigm highlights how crucial it is to have mutual understanding, trust, and support to maintain robust state-to-state relations and overcome obstacles and critiques related to projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The paper's discussion and analysis highlight the strategic importance of CPEC in helping Pakistan handle pressing issues like infrastructure deficiencies and energy shortages while promoting sustainable growth and socioeconomic advancement. It also emphasizes how the relationship helps both parties in several ways, from financial gains to cooperative politics and strategic alliances.

Sino-Pakistani relations are based on security cooperation, which is fueled by shared threat assessments and the requirement for strong defence capabilities. Realist viewpoints emphasize the value of military cooperation, such as arms transfers, cooperative training, and counterterrorism initiatives, which bolster Pakistan's armed forces and guarantee China a trustworthy strategic ally. Even though the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project, China is investing in Pakistan in a variety of industries, including resource extraction, technology, and agriculture. The liberalist ideas of economic interconnectedness are reflected in this diversity, which encourages reciprocal growth and the creation of common economic interests that advance cooperation and stability. Pakistan benefits from China's market expansion, which strengthens bilateral economic connections even further.

In terms of culture, China uses constructivism to build Confucius Institutes, expand media presence in Pakistan, and facilitate educational exchanges to bolster its soft power. The objective of these endeavors is to mold attitudes, establish enduring cultural bonds, and promote reciprocal comprehension, thereby augmenting the Pakistani public's favorable opinion of China. Even with these solid bases, problems still exist. Significant obstacles include political unpredictability, local opposition to certain projects, and security concerns in areas like Balochistan. However, there are encouraging prospects for the future due to the possibility of more integration and cooperation in emerging industries like technology and renewable energy.

All things considered, a combination of power relations, economic collaboration, and cultural



diplomacy propel China's strategic objectives in Pakistan. In addition to improving Sino-Pakistani relations, this multilayered involvement has significant ramifications for both regional stability and international geopolitics. Through the resolution of current issues and the utilization of their all-encompassing alliance, China and Pakistan have the potential to augment their strategic collaboration, thereby augmenting regional stability and interconnectivity.

Future Recommendations:

Enhancing people-to-people exchanges, diversifying CPEC projects beyond energy and infrastructure, promoting sustainable development practices, ensuring transparency and accountability in project implementation, fostering regional integration, investing in capacity building and skills training, and stepping up strategic communication efforts to counter negative perceptions are some future recommendations for improving Pakistan-China relations and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These suggestions can help Pakistan and China strengthen their alliance, get the most out of CPEC, and advance shared prosperity and sustainable growth in the area.

It is advised that China and Pakistan take several important steps to strengthen their strategic alliance. First and foremost, regional peace depends on enhancing security cooperation through coordinated counterterrorism operations and naval cooperation at the Gwadar port. China could diversify its economic ties with Pakistan by concentrating on technology, renewable energy, and agriculture. It should also promote local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by forming joint ventures and transferring knowledge. Increasing scholarships and encouraging academic partnerships, as well as growing Confucius Institutes and cultural initiatives to build soft power, can all help to strengthen cultural and educational exchanges. Improving transport and logistics hubs and establishing a link between Pakistan and Central Asia can foster regional connectivity, which in turn can boost trade and integration.

Reducing resistance and fostering goodwill can be achieved by guaranteeing ecologically sustainable methods in development projects and addressing local issues through community engagement. Enhancing coordination and addressing more comprehensive regional concerns can be achieved by establishing bilateral frameworks as institutional tools for cooperation and by interacting with regional groups such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Encouraging collaborative research ventures can yield significant insights and help shape policy decisions, while improving transparency and communication about project benefits can foster public trust. By putting these suggestions into practice, ties between China and Pakistan will improve, problems will be resolved, and stability and prosperity will be promoted in the area.



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