

**PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS
CHINA IN XIJINPING ADMINISTRATION (2013-
2023): AN APPRAISAL**

BY

Muhammad Faisal



**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN
LANGUAGES**

ISLAMABAD

July, 2025

**PAKISTAN’S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS
CHINA IN XIJINPING ADMINISTRATION (2013-
2023): AN APPRAISAL**

By

Muhammad Faisal

M.Phil. National University of Modern Languages Islamabad, 2025

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
in **PAKISTAN STUDIES**

To

DEPARTMENT OF PAKISTAN STUDIES
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES,
ISLAMABAD

© Muhammad Faisal 2025



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read the following thesis, examined the defence, are satisfied with the overall exam performance, and recommended the thesis to the Faculty of Social Science for acceptance.

Thesis Title: Pakistan's Foreign Policy Towards China In Xi Jinping Administration (2013-2023): An Appraisal

Submitted by: Muhammad Faisal

Registration #: 14 MPhil/PS/S22

Master of Philosophy

Pakistan Studies

Supervisor: Dr. Fazal Rabbi

Signature of Research Supervisor

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Riaz Shad
Name of Dean (FSS)

Signature of Dean (FSS)

ABSTRACT

“Pakistan’s Foreign Policy Towards China in Xijinping Administration (2013-2023): An Appraisal”

This thesis presents an in-depth analysis of Pakistan’s foreign policy towards China during the Xi Jinping administration (2013-2023), focusing on the complex and multifaceted nature of their bilateral relationship, viewed through socio-political, geo-strategic, and economic perspectives. The study situates this relationship within the context of shifting global power dynamics and examines how major initiatives, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), influence regional security, economic integration, and diplomatic alignment. Drawing upon primary and secondary sources including scholarly literature, official documents, and reports from the CPEC Secretariat it explores the strategic implications of China’s rise as a regional hegemon under Xi Jinping. The research considers how this ascent intersects with Pakistan’s socio-economic and developmental challenges, while tracing the historical and contemporary evolution of Sino-Pakistani ties. It also explores how both nations manage shared security concerns and mutual economic interests amid a rapidly transforming global order. Ultimately, the study underscores the significance of sustained bilateral engagement and institutional cooperation, offering insights into the opportunities and challenges this partnership presents for regional stability in South Asia and the broader geopolitical landscape.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, **Muhammad Faisal**, Son of **Muhammad Farooq**, Registration # **14 MPhil/PS/S22**, Discipline **Pakistan Studies**, Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages, do hereby declare that the thesis **“Pakistan’s Foreign Policy Towards China in Xij Jinping Administration (2013-2023): An Appraisal”** submitted by me in partial fulfilment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution. I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled, and the degree revoked.

Signature of Candidate

Date _____

Muhammad Faisal
Name of Candidate

Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that research work presented in the thesis, entitled “Pakistan’s Foreign Policy Towards China In Xij Jinping Administration (2013-2023): An Appraisal” was conducted by Muhammad Faisal under the supervision of Dr. Fazal Rabbi No part of this thesis has been submitted anywhere else for any other degree.

This thesis is submitted to the Department of Pakistan Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MPhil in Pakistan Studies at the National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad.

Dr. Fazal Rabbi

Dedication

DEDICATED

TO

MY DEAREST MOTHER AND FATHER, THE GUIDING STARS OF MY LIFE

Acknowledgment

I am expressing my deepest gratitude to Allah Almighty, whose boundless mercy and guidance have granted me the strength, health, and resources to complete this thesis and persevere through life's challenges. My profound reverence goes to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the eternal guide and beacon for humanity, whose teachings continue to inspire righteousness and wisdom.

Additionally, I extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Fazal Rabbi, whose invaluable guidance and steadfast encouragement were instrumental in the successful completion of this thesis. His expertise and mentorship enabled me to navigate the complexities of this research field, significantly shaping my academic journey. I truly grateful to the faculty of the Pakistan Studies Department for their academic expertise and constructive feedback, which were pivotal in refining this study and fostering my intellectual growth.

Furthermore, I'm deeply grateful to my friends for their unwavering support and insightful advice throughout this endeavor. I am especially indebted to my family, whose steadfast love, belief, and patience have been foundational to my success. Their constant motivation sustained me through the challenges of this academic journey, and I remain forever thankful for their enduring encouragement.

Muhammad Faisal

List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
KM	Kilometer
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
PRC	People's Republic of China
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communication
TCM	Traditional Chinese Medicine
UN	United Nations
US	United States

USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WB	World Bank

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM.....	I
ABSTRACT	2
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION	IV
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL	V
DEDICATION	VI
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	VII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	VIII
TABLE OF CONTENTS	X
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	3
1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY.....	4
1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY.....	5
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	5
1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	5
1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	6
1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW	8
1.7 DELIMITATION.....	14
1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY	16
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (1947-2012)	17
2.1 INTRODUCTION	17
2.2 EARLY DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND COLD WAR TENSIONS (1947-1960)	18
2.3 STRENGTHENING TIES AND MILITARY COOPERATION IN THE 1960s	23
2.4 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN THE 1970s: WAR, NUCLEAR COOPERATION, AND ECONOMIC EXCHANGES	25
2.5 CONSOLIDATION AND EXPANSION IN THE 1980s: SOVIET-AFGHAN WAR, MILITARY COOPERATION, AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION.....	28
2.6 THE 1990s: POST-COLD WAR REALIGNMENT AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS	31
2.7 THE 2000s: EVOLVING TOWARDS A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN RESPONSE TO GLOBAL CHALLENGES	33
2.8 CONCLUSION	36
CHAPTER THREE: POLITICAL ASPECTS OF PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS	38
3.1 INTRODUCTION	38
3.2 BILATERAL VISITS AND DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENTS IN PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS.....	39

3.3 DEFENCE AND MILITARY COOPERATION IN PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS	42
3.4 POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC ALLIANCES	45
3.5 SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVE	47
3.6 CHINA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS: STRATEGIC ALLIANCES AND DOMESTIC POLITICS.....	49
3.7 IMPACT OF GLOBAL POLITICAL CHANGES: CHINA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER	51
3.8 CONCLUSION	53
CHAPTER FOUR: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS.....	55
4.1 INTRODUCTION	55
4.2 BILATERAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION: TRADE, INVESTMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE	57
4.3 CPEC: FUELLING ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENERGY SECURITY, AND COOPERATION	60
4.4 STRENGTHENING BILATERAL TIES THROUGH SOCIO-CULTURAL EXCHANGES: THE CHINA-PAKISTAN EXPERIENCE	62
4.5 HEALTH, SOCIAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF CHINA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS	65
4.6 CHALLENGES AND ISSUES: AN ANALYSIS.....	67
4.7 CONCLUSION	69
CHAPTER FIVE: GEO-STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS OF PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS	71
5.1 INTRODUCTION	71
5.2 STRATEGIC LOCATION AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS	73
5.3 MILITARY COOPERATION AND SECURITY ALLIANCES	75
5.4 MARITIME SECURITY AND NAVAL COOPERATION	77
5.5 STRATEGIC ECONOMIC CORRIDORS	80
5.6 INFLUENCE OF GLOBAL STRATEGIC CHANGES: THE NEW WORLD ORDER.....	82
5.7 CONCLUSION	85
CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS.....	87
6.1 FINDINGS.....	88
6.2 CONCLUSION	90
6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	91
REFERENCES	94
OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT & INSTITUTIONAL SOURCES	94
BOOKS	94
JOURNAL ARTICLES	96
UNPUBLISHED THESES OR DISSERTATIONS	103
WEBSITES (NON-GOVERNMENT)	103
OFFICIAL WEBSITES	104

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The evolution of Sino-Pakistan relations from 1947 to 2012 have been highlighted in this chapter, beginning with Pakistan's early diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1950, a decision that laid the groundwork for a strategic alliance aimed at countering Indian regional dominance.¹ The bilateral relationship was formalised through the 1963 Boundary Agreement, which not only resolved border disputes but also strengthened mutual trust. During the 1962 Sino-Indian War and the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War, Pakistan and China offered each other political and strategic support, reinforcing their shared regional interests.² These early interactions fostered military cooperation, including arms transfers and high-level defence exchanges, contributing to the long-term alignment of their security interests.³ Amid Cold War rivalries and shifting alliances, both states prioritized strategic convergence, creating a partnership characterized by resilience and mutual accommodation. This durable alliance played a crucial role in shaping South Asia's security architecture and still continues to influence regional geopolitics.

Pakistan's foreign policy towards China has undergone a remarkable transformation under Xi Jinping's administration from 2013 to 2023, reflecting a deepened partnership with profound geopolitical implications.⁴ This relationship, rooted in shared strategic interests and a mutual desire for regional stability, positions Pakistan as a key ally in China's broader global ambitions, particularly within South Asia.⁵ Under Xi's leadership, the Sino-Pakistani alliance has been elevated beyond conventional diplomacy, emerging as a central pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy strategy. This introduction sets the stage for a detailed exploration across three

¹ Ghulam Ali, *China-Pakistan Relations: A Historical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 18-22.

² Ibid., 25-30

³ A.Z. Hilali, *China-Pakistan Relations: Historical, Cultural, and Strategic Perspective* (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 112-115.

⁴ Ali, *China-Pakistan Relations*, 150-158.

⁵ Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* (London: Hurst & Co., 2015), 121-135.

chapters focusing on historical foundations, defence and strategic cooperation as well as economic initiatives, offering a nuanced appraisal of the evolving bilateral dynamic.

Chapter 1 explores the historical trajectory of Pakistan-China relations, tracing their development from the formal establishment of diplomatic ties in 1951 to the contemporary era under President Xi Jinping.⁶ The early phase of the relationship, marked by the 1963 border agreement and mutual support during the Cold War, laid a durable foundation for long-term cooperation. Despite regional upheavals such as the 1965 and 1971 India Pakistan wars, during which China extended diplomatic support to Pakistan, the bilateral relationship evolved into a robust strategic partnership. This chapter emphasizes how historical alignment, deepened by Xi's geopolitical vision since 2013, continues to shape present-day policy frameworks.⁷

Chapter 2 examines defence and strategic alliances, a central pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy. This period has seen intensified military cooperation, including joint exercises such as the Shaheen series and the co-development of the JF-17 Thunder aircraft, aimed at countering India's regional influence.⁸ Xi Jinping's strategic recalibrations, reflected in China's positions at the United Nations on issues like Kashmir, and enhanced engagement through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation have further strengthened Pakistan's security posture. The 2019 Pulwama crisis tested this alliance, yet China's measured diplomatic support underscored a realist approach to maintaining regional power balance while managing both domestic and international constraints.⁹

⁶ Jhon W Garver, *China and Pakistan: A Strategic Partnership* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2016), 41-65.

⁷ Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis*, 121-135.

⁸ Ibid., 97-122

⁹ Muhammad Faisal, "Pakistan-China Military Cooperation: Impact on Strategic Stability in South Asia," *Strategic Studies* 39, no. 2 (2019): 73-89.

Chapter 3 focuses on economic cooperation, with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as its centrepiece since 2015.¹⁰ Valued at \$62 billion, CPEC promises to transform Pakistan’s infrastructure and energy sectors, while enhancing China’s presence in the Indian Ocean. However, security challenges in Balochistan and external pressures, including India’s Chabahar port ambitions, complicate this partnership.¹¹ This chapter appraises how Pakistan balances economic gains with strategic risks, aligning with Xi’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) while managing relations with other powers such as the United States and Iran.

This thesis, spanning from 2013 to 2023, offers a comprehensive appraisal of Pakistan’s foreign policy towards China under Xi Jinping, weaving together historical resilience, strategic alliances, and economic ambitions. Through a realist lens, it illuminates how power, security, and mutual interests drive this partnership, shaping South Asian geopolitics amidst evolving global challenges.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Sino-Pakistan relationship during the Xi Jinping administration (2013-2023) presents multifaceted challenges and opportunities with significant implications for both nations’ socio-political, geostrategic, and economic spheres. This decade has seen intensified cooperation, notably through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has significantly reshaped the nature of their partnership. Given China’s rising global influence and Pakistan’s strategic role in South Asia, it is essential to examine how these developments have shaped bilateral relations. A significant challenge lies in addressing security dilemmas, economic competition, and geopolitical shifts that influence regional stability. Consequently, the extent to which China’s investments, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), have

¹⁰ Arif Rafiq, “*The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Barriers and Impact*,” United State Institute of Peace and Special report no. 407 (October 2016): 1-20.

¹¹ Siegfried O. Wolf, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative: Concept, Context and Assessment*,” (Cham: Springer, 2019), 131-149.

addressed Pakistan's socio-economic and strategic challenges requires thorough analysis. Moreover, it is crucial to assess how the strategic alignment between both nations has strengthened their foreign policy objectives and enhanced regional security. This study aims to provide an analysis of these dynamics, analysing the complexities of Sino-Pakistani relations in an evolving multipolar world while providing insights into the potential for sustained collaboration and mutual prosperity.

1.2 Significance of Study

This study makes a comprehensive analysis of the empirical, political, and economic dimensions shaping Sino-Pakistani relations during the Xi Jinping's administration (2013-2023). By examining how these aspects strengthen this critical bilateral partnership, it highlights the growing prominence of geostrategic and geo-economic objectives in contemporary international relations. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), exemplified by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), serves as a key example of enhanced cooperation, fostering economic development and reinforcing the strategic alliance between both nations. Therefore, the current research underscores the need to examine the evolving dynamics of Sino-Pakistani relations, particularly with regard to their implications for Pakistan's foreign policy and regional stability in an increasingly multipolar world.

The current study aims at providing an in-depth analysis of the empirical, political, economic, and military dimensions shaping Sino-Pakistani relations during the Xi Jinping administration (2013-2023), a period marked by China's growing global influence and Pakistan's strategic role in South Asia. By examining how these different aspects strengthen this critical bilateral partnership, the study discusses increasing prominence of geostrategic, geo-economic, and security objectives in contemporary international relations. The cooperation between the Chinese and Pakistani militaries is a key focus, with significant implications for South Asian security, necessitating a reassessment of traditional international

relations paradigms. Addressing gaps in existing literature, this research analyses the unique dynamics of this evolving partnership, arguing that it fosters socio-economic development and strategic objectives. Therefore, it contributes to the academic discourse on Sino-Pakistani relations and informs future policy-making for regional stability in an increasingly multipolar world.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To study Xi Jinping's progression of socio-political ties with Pakistan and its impact on foreign policy.
2. To evaluate economic effects of Sino-Pakistan ties (2013-2023), focusing on CPEC's growth.
3. To explore geostrategic cooperation's impact on Pakistan's policy amid global shifts.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How have the socio-political aspects of Sino-Pakistani collaboration impacted Pakistan's foreign policy?
2. What is the economic significance of Sino-Pakistani relations, particularly the growth of CPEC, under the Xi Jinping administration (2013-2023)?
3. What is the geo-strategic significance of Sino-Pakistani relations under the Xi Jinping administration (2013-2023)?

1.5 Research Methodology

This study incorporates a qualitative research methodology, examining various primary and secondary sources to gain a deeper understanding of the topic, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy Towards China in Xi Jinping Administration (2013-2023); An Appraisal*. Additionally, historical events have been contextualised to demonstrate balanced foreign policy pursuits between the two states. The qualitative method is based on analysis, interpretation, and

thorough examination of case studies. Secondary data has been analysed through the study of selected research papers, book reviews, research articles, books, and unofficial publications from various think tanks. The qualitative research method is inherently exploratory, aiming at providing a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena related to the topic, including experiences and behaviours of the policymakers. The research methodology also involves independent case study analysis of selected phenomena. As for the primary data, reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been analysed to ensure the study's credibility across multiple dimensions. Furthermore, the study incorporates official documents such as those produced by the CPEC Secretariat, the CPEC Fact Book 2019, and the CPEC Quarterly Magazine, as well as key information from the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Similarly, secondary data from various research papers and research articles have been studied to enable a refined interpretation of the topic within the specified research timeframe. Moreover, the historical context of the topic is limited in several respects. The research methodology is qualitative, thus enhancing the academic rigour and credibility of the topic. Finally, the sources in the broader context are largely empirical, reinforcing the relevance and rigour of the ongoing research debate surrounding the current topic.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

Theory serves as a lens through which we can interpret the international system, offering a framework to understand state behaviour and interactions. Among the prominent theories, Realism stands out as the most applicable lens for analysing the Pakistan-China relationship, particularly as explored in this thesis. Unlike Liberalism, which emphasises cooperation and institutions, or Complex Interdependence, that highlights transnational ties and economic interlinks, Realism focuses on the anarchic nature of the international system, where states prioritise survival, power, and security. This perspective aligns closely with the strategic

motivations driving the Pakistan-China alliance, especially under Xi Jinping's leadership since 2013.

Realism asserts that states act in their self-interest, seeking to maximise power to ensure security in a world devoid of a central authority. The Pakistan-China partnership, fortified through military cooperation (e.g., JF-17 Thunder co-development), joint exercises (e.g., Shaheen series), and economic projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), exemplifies this principle. These initiatives are not merely cooperative ventures but strategic moves to counterbalance India's growing influence in South Asia, a key regional rival. The CPEC, with its \$62 billion investment and 9,605 km route reduction, enhances China's strategic foothold while bolstering Pakistan's defence posture, reflecting a realist pursuit of power projection and deterrence.

Moreover, Realism highlights the role of military and economic capabilities in shaping state behaviour, a theme evident in the thesis' discussion of defence agreements and CPEC's security framework. China's support in modernising Pakistan's naval and missile forces, alongside political backing on issues like Kashmir in the United Nations, underscores a mutual interest in maintaining a balance of power. This alliance, despite challenges like Balochistan instability or India's counter-alliances (e.g., with the US and Japan), persists because both nations recognise the necessity of strength against external threats, a cornerstone of realist thought.

The regional dimension, including SCO participation and counterterrorism efforts, further illustrates Realism's relevance. These platforms are leveraged to project influence and counter Western dominance, aligning with the realist view that states form alliances to enhance their security and strategic interests. While domestic and international pressures (e.g., 2019 Pulwama crisis scrutiny) pose risks, the enduring Sino-Pakistani bond reflects a pragmatic

acceptance of power politics, where mutual security and regional stability are pursued through a shared realist agenda. Thus, Realism provides a robust framework to interpret the Pakistan-China relationship as a strategic partnership rooted in power, survival, and regional dominance.

1.6 Literature Review

The existing body of literature on Pakistan's foreign policy towards China is extensive and multifaceted, encompassing a wide range of perspectives and analyses. This literature has been systematically examined in a chronological manner, delineating the relationship into distinct phases that highlight its socio-political, economic, and strategic dimensions, particularly under the Xi Jinping administration (2013-2023). Various scholars have engaged in significant debates surrounding key variables pertinent to this research, exploring the intricate dynamics that define Sino-Pakistani relations during this crucial period. Through this comprehensive examination, the present study aims at establishing a credible foundation for understanding the evolving complexities of the bilateral partnership.

Laurence Vandewalle in his work, *Pakistan and China: 'Iron Brothers' Forever?* illustrates the long-standing relationship between China and Pakistan in various domains. Despite ideological differences, the two nations share more than a 520-kilometre border and this shared frontier underscores the importance of maintaining cordial relations between them. In 2015, Xi Jinping, during his visit, expressed a firm commitment to real-time development of cooperation between China and Pakistan through economic and socio-political frameworks. This was accompanied by a commitment to enhance the Belt and Road Initiative through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The gap in this research is linked to the strategic and political dimensions and their influence on foreign policy formulation. This paper adopts a Eurocentric approach, focusing on Western perspectives and interests. While this may limit the understanding of the broader regional implications, it still provides valuable context for analysing China's global competition. This perspective helps to contextualise the BRI and

CPEC within the global economic and strategic landscape, though a more inclusive perspective is needed to fully understand the initiatives' effects on directly involved regions.

Masood Khalid in his work, *Pakistan-China Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Environment* highlights the importance of a credible relationship between China and Pakistan aiming at shifting global power dynamics. In recent global developments, the cooperation between China and Pakistan as a model of inter-state relations has witnessed a period of significant growth and mutual engagement. Both nations have demonstrated a rationale of mutual trust, a convergent outlook, and shared interests in contemporary global affairs. The knowledge gap in this study lies in its limited treatment of various dimensions of geopolitical and economic aspects. The limitation of Khalid's article also lies in its predominantly descriptive nature rather than offering critical analysis. Additionally, the author does not cite any sources. The current study addresses these issues in detail to bridge the epistemic gap in the academic discourse.

Amina Faisal, in her research paper, *Pakistan-China Relations: Beyond CPEC*, examines the qualitative transformation in the cooperative relationship between China and Pakistan. There is evident growth from defence to economic spheres within the bilateral relationship. In this research paper, the dynamics of interdependence are explored beyond the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Specifically, defence pacts and strategic agreements are discussed as key elements advancing strategic collaboration between the two nations. This article, however, is limited in scope, focusing predominantly on CPEC, specifically on the period from 2013-2018. To address this gap, the present study will examine a broader set of dimensions extending the analysis to 2023 and providing a more detailed analysis of Xi Jinping's relations with Pakistan.

Muhammad Aslam et al., in their article, *Pakistan-China Relations and its Implications for India (2008-2018)*, provide a detailed analysis of the evolving dynamics between Pakistan and China in economic, strategic, and political domains during this period. The article highlights how initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have reshaped the regional power balance in South Asia and influenced India's regional strategic outlook. It also examines the historical backdrop of Sino-Pakistani relations since 1949 and the way these ties have strengthened, particularly in the context of global events such as the 9/11 attacks.

The article emphasises that while Sino-Pakistani relations have been mutually beneficial, they also present challenges for India, which remains cautious due to unresolved regional disputes and strategic rivalries. However, it does not address developments under Xi Jinping's administration after 2018, which marked a significant shift in China's foreign policy and economic strategies. This gap leaves room for further academic inquiry into how deepening Sino-Pakistani ties under Xi Jinping have influenced Pakistan's foreign policy, particularly in balancing its relations with other regional and global powers.

Anjali Sehrawat's research article, *Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance and India-China Relations in Contemporary Geopolitics (2023)*, presents a comprehensive analysis of the geopolitical relationships between China, Pakistan, and India, particularly in the post-World War II era. The article examines the historical, political, and economic factors that have shaped the complex dynamics among these countries, focusing on events such as the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the evolving China-Pakistan partnership, which has largely been driven by shared concerns over India's regional influence.

While the mentioned article provides valuable insights into the strategic motivations underpinning these alliances, it has several limitations. It does not offer a detailed chronological

account of Sino-Pakistani relations since Pakistan's inception and fails to provide an in-depth analysis of the socio-political impacts of this partnership on Pakistan's foreign policy.

Moreover, the economic significance of Sino-Pakistan relations under Xi Jinping's administration is insufficiently examined, with limited focus on specific economic agreements and the implications of initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Furthermore, the article only briefly addresses the geo-strategic dimensions of Sino-Pakistani cooperation, without fully exploring the military collaborations and strategic dialogues that substantially influence Pakistan's foreign policy. Despite these shortcomings, the article underscores the necessity of a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the evolving geopolitical landscape in South Asia.

Iram Khalid and Muhammad Tahir Rashid, in their work, *Pakistan's Strategic Potential and Diplomatic Relations with China under Xi Jinping*, contextualise the relationship between China and Pakistan and how it has evolved over a specific period (2013-2023). Moreover, the study illustrates several factors, including the consolidation of strategic interdependence.

The authors further state that, alongside political interdependence, the two nations have engaged each other in securing their respective national interests. Owing to their geostrategic significance, both nations have established a growing imperative for comprehensive cooperation.

Since the events of 9/11, bilateral relations have significantly strengthened under the leadership of Xi Jinping. This is evident in numerous domains of mutual collaboration. However, the study fails to specify the forms of strategic cooperation that have led to this interdependence. Additionally, it fails to adequately address how both nations engage politically and diplomatically to secure mutual benefits.

The strategic relationship between Pakistan and China, as detailed in Umbreen Javaid and Asifa Jahangir's study, *Pakistan-China Strategic Relationship: A Glorious Journey of 55 Years*, exemplifies an enduring international partnership forged over decades despite differing belief systems and cultural backgrounds. Initiated in 1950 with Pakistan's recognition of China as an independent state, this relationship has evolved significantly, culminating in the formalisation of a strategic partnership through the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good-Neighbourly Relations in April 2005.

This extensive study meticulously traces the historical development of Sino-Pakistani relations from 1950 to 2005, analysing their interactions within the broader geopolitical contexts of the Cold War and Post-Cold War South Asia. It emphasises how both nations navigated complex global and regional dynamics to strengthen their bilateral ties, marked by numerous diplomatic, economic, and military engagements.

The study highlights the gradual progression of the relationship, illustrating how initial diplomatic ties evolved into a resilient strategic alliance. However, the research does not extend to more recent developments under Xi Jinping's leadership, focusing instead on the foundational aspects of Pakistan's foreign policy towards China. This historical perspective provides valuable insights into the trajectory of bilateral cooperation, offering a comprehensive understanding of how their strategic collaboration has been shaped over more than five decades.

Kataria and Naveed's article, *Pakistan-China Social and Economic Relations* explores the multifaceted and historically robust relationship between Pakistan and China, two significant nations from South and East Asia, respectively. The authors emphasise the enduring reliability and mutual trust that characterise this bilateral relationship, highlighting its political,

defence, social, and economic dimensions. By examining various agreements and collaborative projects, they illustrate how partnership has evolved and the way new trends shape it.

However, the article's scope is limited to the 21st century and primarily focuses on the earlier phase of Xi Jinping's leadership, leaving a gap in understanding how more recent developments under his administration have influenced the relationship. Despite its comprehensive coverage, the study's temporal limitations indicate the need for further research to fully capture the impact of contemporary dynamics on the Sino-Pakistani alliance.

The article, *The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor* by Maham Hameed examines the significant rise in China's influence in the Global South over the past decade, with a particular focus on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its interaction with Pakistan's political and economic realities. The analysis reveals that while China promotes a discourse of mutual benefit and non-intervention, its engagement in Pakistan is complex and not without repercussions. The article outlines how the historical development of regionalism in Pakistan has been exacerbated by CPEC, with regionalist forces either demanding a larger share of the benefits or outrightly rejecting the project. Additionally, it highlights how the project has intensified the already skewed civil-military relations in Pakistan, leading to increased military control over civilian and economic matters related to CPEC.

Despite its insightful examination of the political dynamics and impacts of CPEC, the mentioned study fails to address the economic significance of Sino-Pakistani relations under Xi Jinping's administration, nor does it examine the broader geo-strategic aspects of Sino-Pakistani cooperation that influence Pakistan's foreign policy. The present research seeks to address these omissions by analysing how Xi Jinping's policies, along with the geo-strategic dimensions of Sino-Pakistani collaboration, are shaping both the economic and foreign policy trajectories of Pakistan.

Zeb's article, *Pakistan-China Relations: Where They Go from Here?* offers a nuanced examination of the evolving relationship between Pakistan and China, highlighting the deep-rooted and multifaceted nature of their alliance. Describing their friendship as "higher than mountains, deeper than oceans, and sweeter than honey," Zeb underscores the geostrategic and realist foundations that underpin this unique bilateral relationship. The article argues that the future strength and diversification of the Sino-Pakistani partnership largely depend on how effectively the two nations enhance their economic ties.

Despite the generally positive outlook, Zeb identifies several key issues that could influence the relationship's trajectory: terrorism, the security of Chinese personnel in Pakistan, people-to-people contacts, and India's role. However, the article is limited by its focus on developments up to 2012, thus leaving a significant gap in addressing recent dynamics, particularly those emerging under Xi Jinping's leadership. This limitation underscores the need for further scholarly inquiry to examine the evolving dimensions of the relationship and to analyse how contemporary developments have reshaped the historical trajectory of Sino-Pakistani relations.

1.7 Delimitation

This study encounters several limitations that significantly influence both the analytical framework and the data collection process. A fundamental constraint arises from the existing literature, much of which is outdated and has already been subjected to extensive scrutiny, thereby necessitating the re-evaluation of its relevance and limitations in light of contemporary ethical research standards.

In terms of data availability, access to reliable and recent scholarly publications is considerably restricted, which limits the depth and scope of the analysis concerning Pakistan's foreign policy towards China in Xi Jinping administration (2013-2023): An Appraisal.

Moreover, numerous academic sources are characterised by discernible biases and politically influenced interpretations, which may compromise the objectivity of the study's findings.

The research is further constrained by its limited engagement with primary sources, such as interviews, official communications, and first-hand accounts, which could have substantially enhanced the understanding of the nuanced dynamics within Sino-Pakistani relations. Where unique data points were utilized, they were generalized with caution, respecting the sensitivity of the subject matter and upholding ethical research standards.

Finally, the subjective nature of the research introduces additional limitations in fully exploring the deeper and more advanced aspects of Sino-Pakistani cooperation, highlighting the inherent complexities involved in analysing this significant and evolving geopolitical partnership.

1.8 Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 2 Historical Background (1947-2012)

Chapter 3 Political Aspects of Pakistan-China Relations

Chapter 4 Socio-Economic Dimensions of Pakistan-China Relations

Chapter 5 Geo-Strategic Dimensions of Pakistan-China Relations

Chapter 6 Findings, Conclusion and Suggestions/Recommendations

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

(1947-2012)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive examination of the historical backdrop of Sino-Pakistan relations, tracing their origins from the creation of Pakistan in 1947 to the early stages of the Xi Jinping era. Central to this analysis is the question: What is the historical background of Sino-Pakistani relations since the inception of Pakistan? By scrutinising pivotal events, treaties, and developments that have shaped this partnership, this study gain a clearer understanding of the evolving geopolitical, economic, and strategic ties between the two nations. Spanning over seven decades, this chapter explores key milestones, such as the formalisation of diplomatic relations, the strengthening of military and strategic ties, and the economic integration that eventually became a cornerstone of their bilateral relationship. The historical moments explored, herein, highlight the substantial role Sino-Pakistani relations have played within the broader geostrategic context of South Asian and global geopolitics.¹²

Historically, China's self-perception as the "Middle Kingdom" has profoundly influenced its foreign relations, particularly its early engagements with regions such as present-day Pakistan. These interactions, which can be traced back to the Han dynasty, were facilitated by ancient trade routes, including the Silk Road, which linked China to South Asia via Kashmir. Cultural and religious exchanges between the two civilisations were frequent, as evident by the journeys of Chinese travellers such as Faxian and Xuanzang in the 4th to 7th centuries. These historical interactions, alongside the spread of Buddhism into China and the influence of Gandhara Art, helped establish the cultural foundation upon which modern Sino-Pakistani ties

¹² Umbreen Javaid and Asifa Jahangir, "Pakistan-China Strategic Relationship: A Glorious Journey of 55 Years," *South Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (July-December 2015): 45-60.

would later be built. This chapter extends its analysis beyond the diplomatic relations post-1947, acknowledging these deep-seated cultural and historical links, which have subtly yet significantly shaped the trajectory of the bilateral relationship over centuries.¹³

The post-World War II era, marked by the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, was a period of considerable geopolitical transformation in South Asia. The emergence of newly independent states, such as India and Pakistan, led to a complex regional landscape. Initially, Pakistan's foreign policy was heavily influenced by its alignment with Western military pacts such as SEATO and CENTO, during the Cold War. However, the Bandung Conference of 1955 marked a turning point when initial ideological differences between Pakistan and China were gradually reconciled.¹⁴ During the 1960s and 1970s, Sino-Pakistani relations gained significant traction, with both nations expanding their military cooperation, economic agreements, and mutual interests in regional security. As the Cold War drew to a close, these relations evolved to meet the challenges of a new global order, broadening their scope to include economic and infrastructure cooperation, culminating later in landmark projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).¹⁵ This chapter analyses the foundation and steady progression of this "all-weather" friendship, extending into the early 21st century.¹⁶

2.2 Early Diplomatic Relations and Cold War Tensions (1947-1960)

Diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China were formally established on 21 May 1951, marking the commencement of a partnership that has progressively developed into a

¹³ Ali, *China-Pakistan Relations*, 45-52.

¹⁴ Kerry Brown, *CEO, China: The Rise of Xi Jinping* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 188.

¹⁵ Maham Hameed, "The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," *Palgrave Communications* 4 (2018): 1-10, accessed June 4, 2023, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-018-0115-7>.

¹⁶ Iram Khalid and Muhammad Tahir Rashid, "Pakistan's Strategic Potential and Diplomatic Relations with China under Xi Jinping," *Pakistan Vision* 21, no. 1 (2020): 22-39.

robust alliance.¹⁷ As one of the first countries to recognise the People's Republic of China (PRC) on 4 January 1950, Pakistan laid the foundation for an All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership.¹⁸ Although not initially ideological allies, shared interests and mutual support strengthened their relationship over the decades. Early interactions were limited, with both states focusing on their respective challenges, including the Kashmir conflict and the Korean War.¹⁹ Despite Pakistan's alignment with the US-led Western bloc, which elicited suspicions in Beijing, both nations avoided actions detrimental to each other's interests.²⁰ Their partnership exemplified peaceful coexistence despite differing political systems, with a common security threat posed by India further strengthening their bond.²¹ This collaboration laid the groundwork for their enduring partnership into the twenty-first century.²²

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China expanded its strategic relations with South Asian neighbours and global superpowers while consistently prioritising its relationship with Pakistan.²³ Despite its Western alignment, Pakistan was among the first countries to recognise China in 1950, becoming the first Muslim-majority and third non-communist nation to establish diplomatic ties with the PRC.²⁴ In the aftermath of Pakistan's independence in 1947, its foreign policy evolved in response to regional conflicts

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, "Pakistan-China Relations," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, accessed June 6, 2023, <https://mofa.gov.pk/china/>.

¹⁸ Laurence Vandewalle, "Pakistan and China: 'Iron Brothers' Forever?" *European Parliamentary Research Service*, September 2015, 1-15, accessed June 6, 2023, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EXPO_IDA\(2015\)549052](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EXPO_IDA(2015)549052).

¹⁹ Masood Khalid, "Pakistan-China Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Environment," *Institute of South Asian Studies*, no. 30 (2021): 1-9, accessed June 9, 2024

²⁰ Rizwan Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations: Where They Go from Here?" *Revista UNISCI*, no. 29 (2012): 45-58.

²¹ Ali, *China-Pakistan Relations*, 45-52.

²² Javaid and Jahangir, "Pakistan-China Strategic Relationship," 45-60.

²³ *Ibid.*, 180-186.

²⁴ K. Subrahmanyam, "The Interests of External Powers in Pakistan," *International Journal of Politics* 4, no. 3 (1974): 71-88.

and the broader ideological divide, recognising the need to build relations with global powers such as China.²⁵

Political and ideological differences initially created reservations in Pakistan regarding its relationship with China, influenced significantly by the global dynamics of the Cold War.²⁶ Following Pakistan's independence in 1947, its strategic location at the crossroads of Central Asia and South Asia attracted considerable international attention from major powers, including the United States, the Soviet Union (now Russia), Iran, and Afghanistan.²⁷ In the 1950s, as Communist China rose in influence and India expanded its military capabilities, with support from both the USSR and the US, Pakistan, at that time, seeking to counter the perceived threat from India by aligning itself with the Western bloc, initially distanced itself from China, particularly as India forged closer ties with the PRC through the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), leading to Pakistan joining the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in 1954 and the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) in 1955.²⁸ Despite these alliances, Pakistan faced challenges in reaping substantial benefits and endured strained relations with the USSR, particularly after refusing a Soviet visit and aligning with Western positions on Kashmir. Concurrently, China expressed concerns about Pakistan's alignment with the US and Turkey, viewing these partnerships as threats to global peace.²⁹

To ease anti-Western sentiments and strengthen relations with China, Pakistan actively participated in Bandung Diplomacy, especially during the Bandung Conference in 1955.³⁰

²⁵ Bruce Riedel and Pavneet Singh, "U.S.-China Relations: Seeking Strategic Convergence in Pakistan," *Brookings Policy Paper* no. 18 (2010): 1-17, accessed June 18, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/u-s-china-relations-seeking-strategic-convergence-in-pakistan/>.

²⁶ Ali, *China-Pakistan Relations*, 148-152.

²⁷ Rizwan Zeb, "China-Pakistan Strategic Relations: Political and Military Dimensions," *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, 2021.

²⁸ Charles A. Fisher, "Containing China? II. Concepts and Applications of Containment," *Geographical Journal* 137, no. 3 (1971): 281-310.

²⁹ Hoo Tiang Boon and Glenn KH Ong, "Military Dominance in Pakistan and China-Pakistan Relations," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 75, no. 1 (2021): 80-102.

³⁰ Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations," 45-58.

There, Pakistani Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra assured China's leadership of Pakistan's lack of hostile intentions, emphasising that its military alliances were solely defensive against threats from India and pledging non-involvement in actions against China. Despite navigating a complex geopolitical landscape and its initial hesitation due to Western affiliations, Pakistan recognised the importance of establishing ties with a Communist state.³¹ The formal recognition of China in 1951 laid the groundwork for diplomatic relations, although the early years were marked by cautious interactions, shaped largely by Pakistan's Western alignment and internal challenges.³² The Bandung Conference proved to be a turning point, allowing both nations to engage more meaningfully and forge a stronger partnership, laying the foundation for future collaboration amid ongoing geopolitical tensions of the Cold War.³³

In 1956, diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China saw incremental progress as Pakistan's then Prime Minister Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy visited China in October, followed by a visit from Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in December.³⁴ However, despite these high-level exchanges, the relationship was slow to develop due to the ideological divides of the time, particularly the prevailing sentiment in India of "Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai" (Indians and Chinese are brothers). This was exacerbated by Suhrawardy's assertion that Communism constituted a significant global threat, a position reinforced during his July 1957 visit to the United States, where he and President Eisenhower concurred that international Communism was the foremost threat to the free world. This declaration understandably upset China and highlighted the geopolitical complexities that hindered closer ties.³⁵ Nevertheless, the groundwork for a more strategic partnership began to take shape, particularly following the

³¹ Ali, *China-Pakistan Relations*, 45-52.

³² *Ibid.*, 51-53.

³³ Khalid, "Pakistan-China Relations," 1-9.

³⁴ Haris Raqeeb Azeemi, "55 Years of Pakistan-China Relationship," *Pakistan Horizon* 60, no. 2 (2007): 109-124.

³⁵ Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations," 50-55.

Bandung Conference in 1955, which helped ease early misunderstandings.³⁶ These early diplomatic interactions were crucial in fostering dialogue and mutual trust, paving the way for deeper cooperation despite broader ideological constraints.³⁷

By the late 1950s, events in the region catalysed a closer alignment between Pakistan and China, particularly the Sino-Indian War of 1962.³⁸ Pakistan, feeling betrayed by the United States for its support of India during the conflict, began to distance itself from its Western allies and sought a stronger partnership with China.³⁹ This shift was reinforced by Pakistan's strategic importance during the Cold War, positioning it as a vital player in regional geopolitics. Early economic collaborations, such as the 1954 Coal-and-Cotton Barter Agreement, laid a foundation for enduring bilateral ties.⁴⁰

However, the relationship faced challenges, including territorial disputes that arose in 1959 when President Ayub Khan was shown a Chinese map claiming significant areas of Pakistan.⁴¹ Border skirmishes also occurred that year, leading Ayub Khan to propose a joint defence pact to Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, which was rejected. Despite these tensions, Pakistan's vote supporting a 1959 UN resolution on Tibet, indicated a complex diplomatic landscape.⁴² Thus, the deterioration of India-China relations, culminating in the 1962 border war and increased US support for India, ultimately drew Pakistan and China closer together, establishing one of the most enduring bilateral relationships in international history.⁴³

³⁶ Khalid, "Pakistan-China Relations," 6-9

³⁷ Azeemi, "55 Years of Pakistan-China Relationship," 120-122.

³⁸ Riedel and Singh, "U.S.-China Relations," 1-17.

³⁹ Ibid., 5-6.

⁴⁰ Ali, *China-Pakistan Relations*, 64-66.

⁴¹ Ibid., 67-70.

⁴² Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations," 52-54.

⁴³ Ibid., 55-58.

2.3 Strengthening Ties and Military Cooperation in the 1960s

During the 1960s, Pakistan and China established a close and strategically significant partnership, primarily influenced by regional tensions and Cold War dynamics. The Sino-Indian War of 1962 played a pivotal role in this alignment, as Pakistan sought to recalibrate its foreign relations in response to India's growing regional power.⁴⁴ Despite earlier differences, such as Pakistan's initial alignment with the Western bloc and its criticism of Communism, the mutual threat posed by India brought China and Pakistan together.⁴⁵ As China clashed with India over territorial disputes along the McMahon Line, Pakistan viewed the conflict as an opportunity to strengthen ties with China.⁴⁶ Pakistan's frustration with its Western allies, particularly the United States, which provided military support to India during the Sino-Indian War, further pushed it towards a stronger relationship with China.⁴⁷ This realignment not only strained Pakistan's relations with India but also laid the foundation for a long-standing strategic partnership with China. The Sino-Indian war highlighted the shared geopolitical interests of Pakistan and China, as both nations sought to counterbalance Indian influence in the region.⁴⁸

A significant milestone in Pakistan-China relations came in 1963 with the signing of the Sino-Pakistan Border Agreement. On 2 March 1963, Pakistan and China successfully negotiated a boundary agreement that resolved territorial disputes and solidified their commitment to peaceful coexistence.⁴⁹ This accord was pivotal in establishing trust between the two nations and demonstrated China's interest in fostering peaceful relations with its

⁴⁴ Ali, *China-Pakistan Relations*, 70-75.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 76-78.

⁴⁶ Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations," 45-48.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 48-50.

⁴⁸ Khalid, "Pakistan-China Relations," 3-5

⁴⁹ Ghulam Ali, *China-Pakistan Relations*, 81-83.

neighbours e.g., Nepal, Burma, and Pakistan.⁵⁰ The agreement also led to the construction of the Karakoram Highway, a vital link connecting China's Xinjiang region with Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan region. This infrastructural development not only facilitated trade but also served as a strategic military route, enhancing bilateral cooperation in both economic and defence sectors. Alongside this agreement, Pakistan and China signed their first formal trade agreement in January 1963, marking the beginning of substantial economic collaboration.⁵¹ These developments during the early 1960s set the stage for a deeper partnership, particularly in military cooperation and mutual defence, as both countries navigated the complexities of Cold War.⁵²

The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 further strengthened the bond between Pakistan and China. As tensions escalated between India and Pakistan, China unequivocally supported Pakistan, condemning India's aggression and providing limited but significant military assistance.⁵³ On 7 September 1965, China formally denounced India's actions as hostile and warned against further escalation, asserting itself as a staunch ally of Pakistan.⁵⁴ This support was particularly crucial for Pakistan, as its treaty partner, the United States, imposed an arms embargo on both India and Pakistan, leaving Pakistan in search of a reliable military ally.⁵⁵ China's military aid during this conflict was pivotal in consolidating the Pakistan-China alliance, as it not only provided Pakistan with immediate defence support but also reduced Pakistan's dependence on Western military aid.⁵⁶ This period also saw increased high-level diplomatic exchanges, including visits by Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi to Pakistan in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 83-85.

⁵¹ Rizwan Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations," 50-52.

⁵² Ibid., 52-55.

⁵³ Riedel and Singh, "U.S.-China Relations," 1-17.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 5-6.

⁵⁵ Government of the People's Republic of China, "Statement of 7 September 1965 Condemning India's Aggression," quoted in "China 'Intervention' During the 1965 Conflict," *Indian Defence Review*, accessed June 24, 2023, <https://indiandefencereview.com/china-intervention-during-the-1965-conflict/>.

⁵⁶ Ibid

1965 and President Ayub Khan to China in 1965, further cementing the strategic nature of their relationship.⁵⁷

Throughout the late 1960s, Pakistan and China expanded their cooperation across various sectors, with a particular focus on defence and military collaboration. China became Pakistan's most important supplier of military equipment, with both countries cooperating on key defence projects including the supply of Type 59 tanks and MiG-19-based F-6 aircraft, as well as the establishment of munitions factories in Pakistan.⁵⁸ Additionally, Pakistan played a crucial role in facilitating diplomatic communication between China and the United States during the Cold War, particularly by assisting in arranging Henry Kissinger's secret visit to China in July 1971.⁵⁹ This not only elevated Pakistan's geopolitical standing but also demonstrated its value as a strategic partner to China in global affairs. By the end of the 1960s, Pakistan and China had solidified a strong strategic partnership, characterised by strong military cooperation, sharing economic interests, and providing mutual support in the face of regional conflicts as well as global power shifts.⁶⁰

2.4 Strategic Partnership in the 1970s: War, Nuclear Cooperation, and Economic Exchanges

The 1970s marked a decade of significant developments in Pakistan-China relations, characterised by a deepening strategic partnership, military cooperation, and economic exchanges. The Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, which culminated in the secession of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, played a pivotal role in strengthening the Sino-Pakistani

⁵⁷ "Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai's Conversation with Pakistan President Ayub Khan," *Wilson Center Digital Archive*, around 5 p.m., 2 April 1965, accessed June 26, 2023, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/record-conversation-between-premier-zhou-enlai-and-president-pakistan-ayub-khan>.

⁵⁸ Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations," 45-58.

⁵⁹ Umbreen Javaid and Asifa Jahangir, "Pakistan-China Strategic Relationship: A Glorious Journey of 55 Years," *Journal of Research and Policy Studies* 52, no. 1 (January-June 2015): 162-169; P. L. Bhola, *Pakistan-China Relations: Search for Politico-Strategic Relationship* (Jaipur: R.B.S.A. Publishers, 1986), 219-222.

⁶⁰ Javaid and Jahangir, "Pakistan-China Strategic Relationship," 165.

alliance. During this conflict, China provided limited military support and substantial economic aid to Pakistan, while also backing Pakistan diplomatically on the international stage.⁶¹ Notably, China exercised its veto power in the United Nations Security Council to delay Bangladesh's admission to the United Nations, underscoring its commitment to supporting Pakistan amidst regional upheaval.⁶² This support came at a time when Pakistan was navigating the aftermath of a devastating defeat, and China's assistance was instrumental in Pakistan's post-war recovery.⁶³ In addition to military and diplomatic backing, China's consistent aid further solidified its position as Pakistan's most reliable ally during a period of regional instability, reshaping the balance of power in South Asia.⁶⁴

A landmark moment in the 1970s was Pakistan's facilitation of US-China rapprochement, beginning with the covert visit of US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger to China in July 1971.⁶⁵ This diplomatic breakthrough paved the way for President Richard Nixon's historic visit to China in February 1972, a pivotal event that realigned global geopolitics by advancing Sino-American normalisation. This strategic triangle involving the United States, China, and Pakistan had significant ramifications for the region. In response, India sought to counterbalance this emerging alliance by signing a security treaty with the Soviet Union in August 1971, solidifying its position within the Soviet bloc.⁶⁶ This Cold War alignment further intensified the geopolitical contest in South Asia when Pakistan and China aligned against India and the Soviet Union. Throughout this period, Pakistan played a critical

⁶¹ Ibid., 169-171.

⁶² Ibid., 170.

⁶³ Ali, *China-Pakistan Relations*, 145-148.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 148.

⁶⁵ Vandewalle, "Pakistan and China," 5-8.

⁶⁶ Fazal-ur-Rehman, "Pakistan's Evolving Relations with China, Russia, and Central Asia," *Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2012): 217-219.

role as a bridge between the United States and China, reinforcing its strategic importance in global Cold War dynamics.⁶⁷

The 1970s also marked the beginning of significant nuclear cooperation between Pakistan and China, especially after India conducted its first nuclear test in May 1974. India's entry into the nuclear club alarmed both Pakistan and China, prompting them to deepen their defence collaboration. China supported Pakistan in building its nuclear capabilities, offering technical expertise and material support.⁶⁸ This cooperation laid the foundation for Pakistan's eventual development of nuclear weapons, which altered the security landscape of South Asia. At the same time, economic relations between Pakistan and China grew, with both countries engaging in technological exchanges and major infrastructural projects. China's support in constructing defence infrastructure in Pakistan, along with substantial economic aid, further entrenched the bilateral partnership.⁶⁹ This combination of military, nuclear, and economic cooperation underpinned the enduring strength of the Pakistan-China relationship throughout the 1970s.

By the late 1970s, the political landscape in the region was further complicated by two significant events: the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. These developments shifted the focus of international powers towards the region, with Pakistan re-emerging as a focal point of Cold War rivalry.⁷⁰ China, condemning the Soviet invasion, extended covert military support to the Afghan resistance through Pakistan, thus strengthening its ties with Pakistan while countering Soviet influence in the region.⁷¹ Pakistan's geopolitical location, particularly its proximity to Afghanistan, Iran, and the broader Middle East, made it a critical player in Cold War dynamics. China's strategic

⁶⁷ Ibid., 228.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 215-220.

⁶⁹ Javaid and Jahangir, "Pakistan-China Strategic Relationship," 160.

⁷⁰ Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations," 45-58.

⁷¹ Ibid., 52-53.

interest in maintaining a strong alliance with Pakistan was driven by its desire to contain Soviet expansion and sustain influence in South Asia along with other adjacent regions. Thus, the 1970s saw the Pakistan-China partnership not only survive but thrive amidst the shifting tides of Cold War geopolitics, marking an era of strategic cooperation that had long-lasting implications for the region.⁷²

2.5 Consolidation and Expansion in the 1980s: Soviet-Afghan War, Military Cooperation, and Economic Integration

The 1980s represented a pivotal period for Pakistan-China relations, driven by Cold War dynamics and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) emerged as a defining moment for their bilateral partnership, with both countries collaborating to counter Soviet expansion in the region.⁷³ Pakistan, as a frontline state in the conflict, became a crucial ally for both the United States and China, with China providing covert military assistance to Afghan resistant forces through Pakistan, thereby strengthening its strategic ties with Pakistan. This cooperation not only aimed to contain Soviet influence but also positioned Pakistan as a vital player in China's regional security strategy, significantly shaping the geopolitical landscape of South Asia.⁷⁴ The relationship flourished with several high-level visits: in June 1980, President Zia-ul-Haq visited China, followed by Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang's visit to Pakistan in June 1981. The two nations commemorated the inauguration of the Khunjerab Pass in August 1982, with President Zia-ul-Haq returning to China later that year in October 1982. The exchange of visits continued throughout Zia-ul-Haq's tenure, with President Li Xiannian visiting Pakistan in March 1984, Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo traveling to China in November 1985, and Zhao Ziyang making another visit to Pakistan

⁷² Javaid and Jahangir, "Pakistan-China Strategic Relationship," 160.

⁷³ Safdar Sial, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: An Assessment of Potential Threats and Constraints," *Conflict and Peace Studies* 6, no. 2 (2014): 15-17.

⁷⁴ Muhammad Aslam, Uzma Naz, Zakir Hussain, and Muhammad Irfan Ahamad, "Pakistan-China Relations and Its Implication for India (2008-2018)," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2022): 253.

in June 1987. In May 1988, Prime Minister Junejo returned to China, and in February 1989, Benazir Bhutto visited China, marking a significant moment following the revival of Pakistan's democratic process. Later that year, in November 1989, Chinese Premier Li Peng visited Pakistan, further solidifying their enduring partnership.⁷⁵

Enhanced military cooperation was another key feature of the 1980s. Pakistan and China expanded their defence collaboration through joint ventures and defence deals, notably the development of military equipment, including the K-8 Karakorum trainer aircraft and initial discussions for the JF-17 Thunder fighter aircraft.⁷⁶ This period also saw the growth of technological and military exchanges, which bolstered Pakistan's defence capabilities with the support of China. Military training exchanges and the sharing of military technology exemplified the depth of cooperation between Pakistan and China, which continued to flourish despite regional challenges and shifting global alliances.⁷⁷

Economic integration between Pakistan and China progressed significantly during the 1980s, highlighted by the establishment of the China-Pakistan Joint Committee for Economy, Trade, and Technology in 1982. This formalized economic cooperation and led to increased aid, infrastructural development, and technological collaboration.⁷⁸ The opening of the Khunjerab Pass in August 1982 symbolized the deepened connectivity and strategic partnership between China and Pakistan, particularly amid regional instability from the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989).⁷⁹ Despite the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Pakistan and China maintained their strong alliance. In 1996, Chinese President Jiang Zemin's state visit to Pakistan marked a pivotal moment, as both countries agreed to establish a comprehensive strategic partnership. By the late 1990s, the Pakistan-China relationship was

⁷⁵ Ibid., 225.

⁷⁶ Khalid, "Pakistan-China Relations," 1-9.

⁷⁷ Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations," 47-53.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 49-50.

firmly entrenched and often described as “higher than mountains, deeper than oceans,” with some Western observers linking it to the close ties between the United States and Israel.⁸⁰

Throughout this period, Pakistan remained a steadfast supporter of China on crucial issues concerning Chinese national interests, including sovereignty over Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet the South China Sea, and human rights. Pakistan’s unwavering support for China on these matters reinforced the mutual trust between Pakistan and China, with China valuing Pakistan as a reliable ally on the international stage. Even in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, Pakistan stood by China, offering diplomatic support during a period of international isolation for China.⁸¹

Despite the evolving geopolitical dynamics, including China’s improved relations with India in the late 1980s, Pakistan did not view these developments as a threat to its own relationship with China.⁸² On the contrary, Pakistani policymakers believed that China’s engagement with India would act as a deterrent to Indian aggression, particularly regarding the Kashmir conflict. While China adopted a more neutral stance on South Asian conflicts towards the end of the decade, its support for Pakistan remained strong, particularly in military and economic spheres.⁸³

The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1988-1989 and the subsequent shift in the United States strategic interests left Pakistan in a precarious position. Having served as a key ally during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989), Pakistan found itself abandoned by the United States, which imposed sanctions due to Pakistan’s covert nuclear weapons programme. This was a development that had been previously tolerated during the War.

⁸⁰ Zeb, “Pakistan-China Relations,” 50.

⁸¹ Khalid, “Pakistan-China Relations,” 7.

⁸² Vandewalle, “Pakistan and China,” 1-15.

⁸³ Anjali Sehrawat, “Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance and India-China Relations in Contemporary Geopolitics,” *International Journal of Advance Study and Research Work* 6, no. 4 (2023): 42-49.

Despite these challenges, China continued to stand by Pakistan,⁸⁴ further consolidating their bilateral relationship as Pakistan and China navigated the changing regional and global order. By the end of the decade, the Pakistan-China partnership had evolved into a comprehensive and multifaceted alliance, with Pakistan and China continuing to rely on each other for strategic, military, and economic support.

2.6 The 1990s: Post-Cold War Realignment and Strategic Developments

The 1990s were a transformative period characterised by significant changes in global and regional dynamics following the end of the Cold War. This shift necessitated a realignment of strategic relations, particularly between Pakistan and China. As the United States reduced its involvement in South Asia,⁸⁵ Pakistan faced increasing isolation, which further strengthened its partnership with China, driven by mutual strategic interests. The conclusion of the Cold War required Pakistan and China to adapt their diplomatic and military strategies to navigate the evolving international order. Amid this backdrop, China's support for Pakistan grew increasingly crucial, particularly in the wake of Pakistan's nuclear tests in May 1998. China provided measured support for these tests, reflecting the deepening security ties that not only fortified their bilateral relationship but also had significant implications for regional security dynamics.⁸⁶ This partnership complicated the security calculus for both India and the United States, particularly as India cited the perceived Chinese threat to justify its nuclear programme.⁸⁷

The economic relations between Pakistan and China expanded significantly throughout the 1990s. With Pakistan under United States sanctions, which limited its access to military

⁸⁴ Iram Khalid and Muhammad Tahir Rashid, "Pakistan's Strategic Potential and Diplomatic Relations With China Under Xi Jinping," *Orient Research Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (June 2021): 181-186.

⁸⁵ Adam Saud and Kinza Arif, "South Asian Geo-Politics from the Prism of Pak-China Relations," *Journal of Peace, Development and Communication* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1-3.

⁸⁶ Ibid.; Khalid and Rashid, "Pakistan's Strategic Potential," 179-186.

⁸⁷ Khalid and Rashid, "Pakistan's Strategic Potential," 179-186.

hardware and technology, China emerged as the primary supplier for Pakistan's military procurement needs.⁸⁸ The growth of bilateral trade was fuelled by China's willingness to engage with Pakistan economically, despite the sanctions imposed by the Western countries.⁸⁹ This era saw key economic reforms in Pakistan, aimed at attracting Chinese investment and establishing joint ventures across various sectors, including infrastructure development, technology transfer, and energy projects.⁹⁰ The collaboration between Pakistan and China laid the groundwork for a comprehensive economic partnership that would endure beyond this decade. This flourishing defence cooperation further solidified their relationship, with China providing essential military equipment and technology, including support for Pakistan's nuclear and missile programmes.⁹¹ The nature of this collaboration became a significant point of contention in Sino-American and Sino-Indian relations, particularly concerning the supply of M-11 ballistic missiles and components for Pakistan's nuclear facilities.⁹²

Throughout the 1990s, despite the evolving geopolitical landscape, the relationship between Pakistan and China remained resilient. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan posed challenges to regional stability; nevertheless, Pakistan and China continued to support one another amid these complexities. Following India's nuclear tests in May 1998, Pakistan engaged in extensive discussions with China to formulate its response, underscoring the strategic importance of their partnership in navigating external pressures.⁹³ The military coup in Pakistan in October 1999, which brought General Pervez Musharraf to power, added another layer to the dynamics of their relationship. Although China did not explicitly support the coup, it regarded it as an internal matter, reflecting its policy of non-interference in the domestic

⁸⁸ Rahman, "Pakistan's Evolving Relations," 212.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 221.

⁹³ Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations," 50.

affairs of its ally.⁹⁴ Hence, the 1990s established a robust framework for Sino-Pakistani relations, characterised by strategic collaboration, mutual support, and a shared commitment to countering external pressures, particularly from the United States and India.⁹⁵ This era set the stage for even deeper cooperation in subsequent decades as Pakistan and China continued to navigate a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

2.7 The 2000s: Evolving Towards a Strategic Partnership in Response to Global Challenges

In the early 2000s, the relationship between Pakistan and China evolved significantly, shaped by the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks and the ensuing global war on terror. After the attacks, Pakistan found itself navigating a complex geopolitical landscape, seeking to balance its historical ties with China against pressures from the United States. High-level consultations became crucial during this period, with a notable meeting occurring on September 18, 2001, when a special envoy from Chinese President Jiang Zemin met General Pervez Musharraf. This engagement helped alleviate Chinese concerns regarding Pakistan's alignment with the United States, assuring Beijing that its strategic interests would not be compromised.⁹⁶ As the United States sought to combat terrorism in Afghanistan, Pakistan aligned itself with the US, but also reinforced its strategic partnership with China, particularly in counterterrorism efforts. The subsequent military standoff between Pakistan and India in 2001-2002 saw China playing a neutral but influential role in de-escalating tensions, which bolstered Pakistan's trust in its long-standing ally.⁹⁷

The early 2000s also marked a period of deepening defence cooperation between Pakistan and China. In December 2001, during General Pervez Musharraf's state visit to China,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 53.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁹⁶ Rahman, "Pakistan's Evolving Relations," 215.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 217.

he publicly supported China's counterterrorism campaign against Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang, which further solidified their alignment on counterterrorism.⁹⁸ This alignment was accompanied by significant military collaboration, including joint military exercises and intelligence sharing. The defence cooperation was formalised through various agreements, which included the joint development of military technologies, such as the JF-17 Thunder fighter aircraft.⁹⁹ The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good-Neighbourly Relations, signed in April 2005, was another critical milestone in their bilateral relationship, establishing a framework for enhanced collaboration in counterterrorism, trade, and economic cooperation. The signing of this treaty highlighted the commitment of Pakistan and China to uphold mutual respect and cooperation in the face of evolving global challenges.

As the decade progressed, significant economic agreements further strengthened the partnership between Pakistan and China. In November 2006, President Hu Jintao's visit to Pakistan resulted in the signing of eighteen agreements, which expanded the scope of cooperation beyond military and political realms to include economic initiatives.¹⁰⁰ The most notable of these agreements was the Pakistan-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed in November 2006, which aimed to boost bilateral trade and economic cooperation significantly.¹⁰¹ This FTA was pivotal in facilitating trade between Pakistan and China, contributing to a notable increase in Chinese investment in various sectors within Pakistan. Economic ties were further enhanced with the establishment of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a landmark initiative designed to improve connectivity and infrastructure

⁹⁸ Ibid., 215-217.

⁹⁹ Ahmad Waqas Makhdoom, Abdul Basit Khan, and Mazhar Abbas Khan, "A Study of Pakistan-China Defense Relations (2000-2012)," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 22 (2014): 184-192.

¹⁰⁰ Ahmad Waqas Makhdoom, Abdul Basit Khan, and Mazhar Abbas Khan, "A Study of Pakistan-China Defense Relations (2000-2012)," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 22 (2014): 184-192.

¹⁰¹ Jafar Riaz Kataria and Anum Naveed, "Pakistan-China Social and Economic Relations," *South Asian Studies* 29, no. 2 (2014): 395-410.

across Pakistan, with projects such as the development of Gwadar Port serving as cornerstones of this partnership.¹⁰²

The early 2000s also witnessed a remarkable increase in Chinese investment in Pakistan, particularly in energy and infrastructural projects. By 2007, Chinese investment was projected to rise from \$4 billion to \$15 billion between 2007 and 2010, reflecting China's commitment to bolstering Pakistan's economic development. Major initiatives included the construction of power plants, highways, and the exploration of gold and copper mines. The deep-sea port of Gwadar became a symbol of this burgeoning economic cooperation, offering a strategic location for trade and commerce and enhancing Pakistan's position in regional geopolitics.¹⁰³ Despite the complexities surrounding Pakistan's alignment with the United States in the global war on terror, the partnership with China continued to flourish, driven by mutual economic interests and shared strategic objectives.

Hence, the relationship between Pakistan and China in the 2000s was marked by a series of high-profile visits, treaties, and cooperation across various sectors. The visits by leaders such as President Hu Jintao in November 2006 and Premier Wen Jiabao in December 2010 reaffirmed the strong bilateral friendship, leading to significant treaties and agreements worth billions of dollars.¹⁰⁴ Notably, President Asif Ali Zardari's visit to China in October 2008 further solidified ties, resulting in additional agreements in trade, energy, and infrastructure.¹⁰⁵ The Sino-Pakistani partnership emerged as a vital axis in the face of global challenges, characterised by an unwavering commitment to mutual support and cooperation. These

¹⁰² Surinder Sehrawat, "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 25, no. 1/2 (2012): 42-49.

¹⁰³ Rizwan Zeb, "Pakistan-China Relations: Where We Are and What We Must Do," *Policy Perspectives* 3, no. 2 (2006): 45-58.

¹⁰⁴ Makhdoom, Khan, and Khan, "Pakistan-China Defense Relations," 184-192.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

developments laid the groundwork for an enduring strategic partnership that would continue to shape the geopolitical landscape of South Asia well into the subsequent decades.¹⁰⁶

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has carefully outlined the historical evolution of Pakistan-China relations from 1947 to 2012, highlighting key events that shaped a resilient strategic partnership. The foundational years following Pakistan's independence in 1947 established a bilateral alliance rooted in mutual support against regional adversaries, notably India. The 1963 Boundary agreement, alongside early diplomatic engagements, laid the groundwork for sustained military and economic cooperation, enabling both nations to navigate regional geopolitical challenges. Facing diplomatic isolation and Cold War pressures, Pakistan and China recognised the necessity of collaboration, fostering a partnership that set a precedent for resilience and deepened ties, particularly in countering shared strategic concerns.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, the Sino-Pakistani partnership deepened through Cold War and post-Cold War challenges, countering Indian and Soviet influence in South Asia. China's nuclear cooperation, initiated in the mid-1970s, and infrastructure projects like the Karakoram Highway (1979), enhanced Pakistan's strategic capabilities and regional connectivity. Despite Pakistan's alignment with the United States during the Soviet-Afghan War, China provided consistent military and diplomatic support. The 1990 Pressler Amendment and 1998 nuclear sanctions prompted Pakistan to rely heavily on Chinese assistance for its nuclear programme, demonstrating the partnership's resilience amidst diplomatic isolation and evolving global dynamics.

The early 2000s marked a pivotal shift in the Sino-Pakistani partnership, with economic integration complementing its strategic and military foundations from 1947 to 2012. The 2005

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 190.

Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good-Neighbourly Relations and the 2006 Pakistan-China Free Trade Agreement, deepened economic ties, while infrastructural projects like Gwadar Port (2002) enhanced energy security and regional connectivity. Post-2001 counterterrorism cooperation, addressing shared concerns such as stability in Xinjiang, reinforced the partnership's resilience. High-level engagements, including President Hu Jintao's visits, underscored strategic convergence. This chapter analyses the partnership's evolution, which strengthened Pakistan's position in South Asia and contributed to regional stability by counterbalancing external powers. It lays the groundwork for examining the Xi Jinping era (2013-2023), where the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor's infrastructure investments reshaped Pakistan's foreign policy, raising critical questions about its impact on regional development and global geopolitical stability.

CHAPTER THREE: POLITICAL ASPECTS OF PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the complex political aspects that have shaped and reshaped the bilateral relations between Pakistan and China under Xi Jinping's leadership. It provides a comprehensive analysis of high-level political engagements, strategic alliances, and the geopolitical significance of Pakistan-China relations, particularly through the lens of evolving global political structures such as BRICS, the Global South, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The interconnected political dynamics explored, herein, have not only fortified the bilateral partnership but also enhanced regional engagement and cooperation, positioning both nations as pivotal actors in both regional and global politics.

In this chapter, pivotal diplomatic milestones have been analysed, such as Xi Jinping's historic visit to Pakistan in 2015, which marked a new era of strategic cooperation and solidified the partnership under the BRI (CPEC).¹⁰⁷ The 2013 visit by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang also underscored the depth of the relationship when his plane was escorted into Pakistani airspace by six JF-17 Thunder jets, a symbol of the close defence ties between the two nations, with the aircraft jointly developed by China and Pakistan.¹⁰⁸ These visits underscored Pakistan's political and military backing for China's regional aspirations, particularly its endorsement of China's role in South Asian forums, despite its non-membership in SAARC.¹⁰⁹ They also illustrate how Pakistan's commitment to the New

¹⁰⁷ Sun Weidong, "Pakistan-China Relations: CPEC and Beyond," *Policy Perspectives* 14, no. 2 (2017): 1-9.

¹⁰⁸ Aarish U. Khan, "Pak-China Economic Corridor: The Hopes and Reality," *Institute of Regional Studies* 33, no. 1 (2015): 43-60.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

World Order, as envisioned by Xi Jinping, coupled with its active engagement in the BRI, has significantly strengthened its political alignment with China's broader global and regional strategies.¹¹⁰

The chapter further explores the political challenges that have tested the resilience of the Pakistan-China relationship, such as internal militancy and attacks on Chinese nationals within Pakistan, which have heightened security concerns.¹¹¹ It analyses Pakistan's initiatives to tackle these issues through counterterrorism collaborations and strategic defence agreements with China, highlighting their joint military exercises and intelligence-sharing frameworks.¹¹² It also examines different developments within the broader geopolitical landscape, including United States and Western responses to China's ascent, anti-China containment strategies, and Pakistan's strategic positioning amidst tensions involving China, India, and Afghanistan.¹¹³ By aligning with China in platforms such as BRICS and advocating for the Global South, Pakistan has not only fortified its political ties with China but also established itself as a vital partner in China's regional and global ambitions.¹¹⁴ Through this detailed exploration, this chapter reveals how political relations have been the backbone of Pakistan-China cooperation, shaping their shared vision for the future in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

3.2 Bilateral Visits and Diplomatic Engagements in Pakistan-China Relations

Diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China were formally established in May 1951, founded on principles of equality and mutual respect for each country's territorial integrity and

¹¹⁰ Sun Weidong, "Pakistan-China Relations," 5.

¹¹¹ Naveed Siddiqui, "'Punish the perpetrators': China presses Pakistan for tighter security," *Dawn*, August 21, 2021, accessed July 2, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1641817>.

¹¹² Makhdoom, Khan, and Khan, "Pakistan-China Defense Relations," 184-188.

¹¹³ Weidong, "Pakistan-China Relations," 3-5.

¹¹⁴ Vandewalle, "Pakistan and China," 4-5.

sovereignty.¹¹⁵ Over the decades, this enduring partnership has evolved, extending beyond mere political ties to encompass a broad spectrum of economic and cultural exchanges. Embassies and consulates have played pivotal roles in facilitating diplomatic missions, enhancing communication, and promoting bilateral trade and investment.¹¹⁶ Regular exchanges and dialogue at various levels have cultivated trust and cooperation, enabling both countries to navigate complex regional dynamics and pursue shared interests. The establishment of embassies in each country has provided a vital platform for bilateral engagement, acting as a bridge for high-level discussions and grass root-level interactions. This relationship has proven significant not only for the two nations but has also attracted global attention, as they navigate the geopolitical complexities of South Asia and beyond.

The trajectory of Sino-Pakistani relations has been significantly shaped by high-level visits, which underscore the depth of strategic dialogue between the two countries. One of the most notable visits occurred on 22 May 2013, when Chinese Premier Li Keqiang arrived in Pakistan, signifying a strengthening of military ties, marked by a ceremonial display of six JF-17 Thunder jets, jointly developed by the two countries.¹¹⁷ This visit set the tone for further diplomatic engagements, culminating in President Xi Jinping's landmark visit on 20 April 2015. This was not only the first visit by a Chinese president to Pakistan in nine years but also marked Xi's first overseas trip in 2015, reflecting the importance of Pakistan within China's foreign policy framework.¹¹⁸ During this visit, both leaders signed fifty-one Memoranda of Understanding, including the critical agreement on CPEC.¹¹⁹ These high-

¹¹⁵ Mohammad Ahmed Qadri and Suwaibah Qadri, "China-Pakistan Relations: With Reference to the Political Economy," *International Journal of Humanities, Arts, Medicine and Sciences* 4, no. 2 (February 2016): 187-94.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹¹⁷ Weidong, "Pakistan-China Relations," 3-4.

¹¹⁸ Francesco Bencivelli and Simona Tonelli, *China's International Projection in the Xi Jinping Era* (Brussels: European Institute for Asian Studies, 2022), 26-27.

¹¹⁹ Bencivelli and Tonelli, *China's International Projection in the Xi Jinping Era*, 26-27. Weidong, "Pakistan-China Relations," 3-8; Aslam et al., "Pakistan-China Relations," 251-260; and Vandewalle, "Pakistan and China," 1-15.

level interactions have been instrumental in forging mutual understanding and aligning the strategic objectives of both nations, solidifying their partnership and commitment to each other's security.

Beyond state visits, strategic dialogues and bilateral forums have served as significant platforms for addressing issues of mutual concern and deepening cooperation. Key discussions have focused on enhancing economic collaboration, security concerns, and regional stability. Notably, during his meeting with President Mamnoon Hussain on 19 February 2014, President Xi Jinping proposed the concept of a "China-Pakistan Community of Shared Destiny."¹²⁰ This proposal underscored the necessity for cooperation and mutual benefit, aligning with Xi's broader foreign policy strategy that promotes shared interests and partnerships.¹²¹ The principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness articulated by Xi during the Conference on 'Diplomatic Work with Neighbouring Countries' in October 2013, have been central to their diplomatic engagements.¹²² Such dialogues have facilitated the establishment of various bilateral forums focused on economic cooperation and strategic discussions, further institutionalizing the relationship and ensuring sustained collaboration.

The cumulative effect of these high-level visits and regular diplomatic engagements has been profound, leading to the strengthening of both diplomatic and strategic ties.¹²³ Each interaction, has paved the way for follow-up actions that extend beyond mere agreements, fostering long-term impacts on regional dynamics and bilateral cooperation. The consistent reinforcement of this partnership reflects a mutual understanding of the

¹²⁰ Khan, "Pak-China Economic Corridor," 43-60.

¹²¹ Jabin T. Jacob and Hoang The Anh, eds., *China's Search for 'National Rejuvenation': Domestic and Foreign Policies under Xi Jinping* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 60.

¹²² Ibid., 60.

¹²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan, "Pakistan-China Relations," last modified January 10, 2024, <https://mofa.gov.pk/china>.

geopolitical landscape, particularly in light of evolving global challenges. As the relationship continues to mature, it is clear that both nations have recognised the significance of sustained engagement and cooperation. This dynamic has laid a robust foundation for addressing future challenges and seizing opportunities in the context of broader geopolitical shifts. Ultimately, the intricate tapestry of visits, dialogues, and collaborative frameworks exemplifies a strategic partnership that not only benefits Pakistan and China but also has wider implications for regional stability and development.

3.3 Defence and Military Cooperation in Pakistan-China Relations

Under the Xi Jinping administration, Sino-Pakistan defence and military cooperation has been strategically deepened, aligning both nations in the political dimension and reinforcing Pakistan's military capabilities in response to regional security challenges.¹²⁴ This cooperation, embodied through joint military exercises like the "Shaheen" air drills and "Warrior" ground exercises, not only enhances operational readiness but also serves broader political objectives such as counterbalancing India's growing influence in South Asia.¹²⁵ These joint exercises, which focus on counterterrorism, air defence and high-intensity warfare, have strengthened tactical coordination and mutual trust, positioning the alliance as a key element in maintaining the regional balance of power. Furthermore, defence agreements, including technology transfers like the co-development of the JF-17 Thunder, have bolstered Pakistan's military posture, embedding China as a vital partner in its defence strategy.¹²⁶ These initiatives driven by political alignment and strategic objectives underscore the evolving nature of the

¹²⁴ Binhong Shao, ed., *China in the World: A Survey of Chinese Perspectives on International Politics and Economics*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 244-245.

¹²⁵ Sadaf Bashir and Sumara Gul, "Countering Terrorism and Reducing Strategic Uncertainty: Analysing 'Shaping' Multinational Military Exercises," *Margalla Papers* 25, no. 2 (2021): 71-73; and Sehwat, "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance and India-China Relations in Contemporary Geopolitics," 42-49.

¹²⁶ Makhdoom, Khan, and Khan, "Pakistan-China Defense Relations," 184-192.

military partnership, shaping both nations' regional influence and contributing to a broader geopolitical stability.

Defence agreements and deals between Pakistan and China have significantly enhanced Pakistan's military capabilities, ensuring that the country remains strategically aligned with its northern neighbour. One of the key deals among them is the co-production of the JF-17 Thunder fighter jet- a project that not only bolstered Pakistan's air defence but also symbolised technological collaboration. The Al-Khalid main battle tank, jointly developed by Pakistan and China, is another hallmark of their defence partnership.¹²⁷ These agreements extend beyond simple procurement to include the transfer of critical defence technologies, enabling Pakistan to strengthen its indigenous defence capabilities. Moreover, China's support has been instrumental in the modernisation of Pakistan's naval and missile forces, contributing to the latter's strategic deterrence potential.¹²⁸ The impact of these defence deals has been profound in altering the balance of military power in South Asia and reinforcing Pakistan's defence posture, particularly in its ongoing rivalry with India. These strategic alignments have positioned China as a vital partner in Pakistan's national security framework, deeply intertwined with its broader defence policies.¹²⁹

Pakistan and China's defence cooperation also extends to counterterrorism collaboration, addressing shared concerns over extremism and regional instability. Both countries face threats from terrorist groups, with China particularly concerned about the Uyghur militant activity in the Xinjiang region and Pakistan dealing with various domestic terrorist factions. Joint counterterrorism efforts include intelligence sharing, joint operations

¹²⁷ Ahmad Waqas Makhdoom, Abdul Basit Khan, and Mazhar Abbas Khan, "A Study of Pakistan-China Defense Relations (2000-2012)," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 22 (2014): 184-192.

¹²⁸ Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, "Nuclear Arms Race in South Asia," *Strategic Studies* 37, no. 1 (2017): 18-41.

¹²⁹ Sehrawat, "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance and India-China Relations in Contemporary Geopolitics," 42-49; Adam Saud and Kinza Arif, "South Asian Geo-Politics from the Prism of Pak-China Relations," *Journal of Peace, Development and Communication* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1-3.

and training initiatives aimed at combating terrorism within and beyond their borders. These efforts are evident in exercises such as the “Warrior” series, which includes a significant counterterrorism component, preparing both militaries for coordinated operations against terrorist cells.¹³⁰ Furthermore, both countries have worked closely on issues concerning the security of CPEC, which has been a target for terrorist groups. China has provided technical and financial support to Pakistan to enhance its counterterrorism infrastructure, further solidifying their collaboration in this domain. Intelligence sharing, a critical aspect of their partnership, has enabled both countries to anticipate and mitigate potential threats, thereby improving regional security.¹³¹

Under Xi Jinping’s leadership, China has actively sought to deepen its defence ties with Pakistan, incorporating military cooperation into its broader foreign policy agenda. Strategic military projects such as the development of CPEC’s security framework reflect Xi’s vision of a comprehensive partnership that goes beyond conventional diplomacy.¹³² Defence cooperation has also been impacted by Xi’s strategic shifts, particularly his focus on strengthening regional alliances and enhancing China’s influence in South Asia.¹³³ Through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative or BRI (with CPEC as its major component), China has integrated defence cooperation into economic and infrastructural projects, ensuring that its investments are safeguarded by a strong security apparatus. For Pakistan, this collaboration has provided critical support in maintaining credible minimum deterrence against India as well as bolstering its defence capabilities against external threats. Thus, the enduring military cooperation between the two countries reflects their shared strategic interests which is

¹³⁰ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Myunghee Lee, and Emir Yazici, “Counterterrorism and Preventive Repression: China’s Changing Strategy in Xinjiang,” *International Security* 44, no. 3 (2019): 9-47.

¹³¹ Bashir and Gul, “Countering Terrorism,” 71-83.

¹³² Saud and Arif, “South Asian Geo-Politics,” 1-3.

¹³³ Makhdoom, Khan, and Khan, “Pakistan-China Defense Relations,” 184-192.

reinforced by Xi Jinping's foreign policy. It further emphasises that mutual security and regional stability are the key pillars of Sino-Pakistani relations.

3.4 Political and Strategic Alliances

The political and strategic alliance between China and Pakistan has been a cornerstone of their bilateral relationship especially in navigating regional dynamics and counterbalancing India's growing influence in South Asia. Under the Xi Jinping administration, this alliance has been fortified through cooperation at international forums such as the United Nations where both countries frequently align on key global issues, including their mutual stance on non-interference and territorial sovereignty. This collaboration is further reflected in their participation in regional organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, where they have collaborated on security initiatives, counterterrorism efforts and regional stability.¹³⁴ Within these frameworks, this partnership enhances their strategic posture, allowing them to influence the regional order while maintaining a shared commitment to sovereignty and non-interventionist policies.

In addition to their collaboration at international forums, China has consistently provided political support to Pakistan during critical moments, particularly in its longstanding conflict with India. China's diplomatic backing in the United Nations on issues like the Kashmir conflict has been pivotal, with Beijing supporting Pakistan's position against Indian claims.¹³⁵ This political support has been crucial during periods of heightened tension such as the 2019 Pulwama crisis, where China maintained a balanced stance but subtly reinforced Pakistan's narrative in international discourse.¹³⁶ Such support underscores the strategic depth

¹³⁴ Anjali Sehrawat, "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance," 42-49.

¹³⁵ Sehrawat, "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance and India-China Relations in Contemporary Geopolitics," 42-49.

¹³⁶ Zulfqar Khan, "Escalating Crises Between India-Pakistan And Deterrence Stability: A Perspective," *Strategic Thought* 2 (2020): 114-128.

of the Sino-Pakistani alliance, especially in addressing bilateral conflicts with India, which remain a shared concern for both nations, given the ongoing regional rivalry.

The regional dimension of their alliance is further emphasised through joint initiatives within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and other local organisations. Both China and Pakistan have leveraged these platforms not only to address security concerns but also to expand economic and political coordination. Their partnership within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a testament to their strategic alignment on issues like counterterrorism, regional security and economic connectivity. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has served as a vehicle for both nations to project their influence in Central Asia and to counterbalance Western dominance in global political and economic affairs.¹³⁷ Such a regional alliance has strengthened their partnership, offering new avenues for strategic collaboration and mutual support.

Despite these strong ties, China-Pakistan cooperation faces political challenges in the evolving global and regional landscape. The shifting dynamics of India-China relations, particularly following border tensions, require careful diplomacy to prevent the undermining of Pakistan's strategic interests. Domestic political changes in Pakistan, along with international scrutiny of strategic projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, pose challenges to maintaining the momentum of their cooperation. Nevertheless, the enduring political and strategic alliance between China and Pakistan remains a central pillar of their foreign policies, offering both countries the means to navigate these challenges while pursuing shared geopolitical objectives.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Anjali Sehrawat, "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance," 42-49.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 42-49

3.5 South Asian Perspective

The Pakistan-China strategic partnership plays a pivotal role in shaping South Asian geopolitics, impacting regional dynamics and altering the balance of power. As these two nations deepen their cooperation, neighbouring countries like India, Afghanistan and Iran have reacted with concern and recalibrated their foreign policies. India's apprehension stems from China's increasing influence in Pakistan, especially through initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which India views as a direct challenge to its regional ambitions.¹³⁹ The collaboration between Pakistan and China also complicates India's security calculus, prompting it to strengthen its alliances such as with the United States and Japan to counter the rising influence of Beijing and Islamabad.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Afghanistan watches the development of this relationship closely as China's increasing presence in Pakistan could affect the geopolitical balance in the Afghan conflict.¹⁴¹ Although Iran maintains cordial relations with both China and Pakistan, it remains cautious due to its interests in regional energy routes and security dynamics, specifically in the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and its implications for regional trade.¹⁴²

Economically, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has emerged as a central feature of this partnership with significant implications for South Asia's economic and security landscape. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor not only promises to transform Pakistan's infrastructural and energy sectors but also enhances China's strategic foothold in the Indian Ocean region, contributing to Beijing's broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁴³ The economic benefits for Pakistan are substantial, positioning the country as a crucial node in

¹³⁹ Muhammad Khalid and Ahsan Rashid, "Pakistan's Strategic Potential in South Asia," *Strategic Studies* 35, no. 4 (2015): 179-186.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁴¹ Hameed, "The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," 64.

¹⁴² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan, "Pakistan-China Relations," accessed August 5, 2024, <https://mofa.gov.pk/china>.

¹⁴³ Xinmin Zhou, *Xi Jinping's Governance and the Future of China* (New York: Skyhorse, 2017), 21-25.

China's global trade and energy routes.¹⁴⁴ However, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor also poses security concerns, especially given the instability in regions like Balochistan, where separatist movements and terrorist activities have targeted the corridor.¹⁴⁵ This has necessitated closer security cooperation between Pakistan and China as both nations aim to protect their economic interests while countering regional security threats. Therefore, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has strategic ramifications for South Asia, potentially shifting trade routes and economic alliances, thereby influencing regional development and security frameworks.

In terms of diplomatic balancing, Pakistan finds itself in a delicate position as it strengthens ties with China while maintaining relations with other South Asian countries. This requires careful diplomacy to avoid alienating neighbouring countries like India and Iran while securing its strategic interests. Pakistan's alliance with China provides it with a strategic counterweight to India's growing influence, particularly in local platforms and international diplomacy, where China actively extends its influence and supports Pakistan's regional and global position.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, this relationship also compels Pakistan to manage its ties with other neighbouring powers carefully, ensuring that its close alignment with China does not jeopardise its broader regional diplomacy. This balance requires Pakistan to engage in strategic partnerships, such as its ongoing relationship with the United States, even as it aligns more closely with China on security and economic matters.

The strategic positioning of Pakistan within South Asia, especially after 2013 with the advent of CPEC, reflects a broader geopolitical realignment. Pakistan's collaboration with China's strategic ambitions in multilateral forums and China's reciprocal support for Pakistan's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) underscore their mutual

¹⁴⁴ Maham Hameed, "The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," *Strategic Studies* 39, no. 2 (2019): 2-6.

¹⁴⁵ Hameed, "The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," 6-7.

¹⁴⁶ Vandewalle, "Pakistan and China," 8-10.

interests.¹⁴⁷ Despite political and security challenges, both countries have remained committed to the success of CPEC, recognising its potential to transform not only their bilateral relationship but also the regional economic environment.¹⁴⁸ As South Asia continues to be a theatre for geopolitical competition, specifically between China and India, the Pakistan–China partnership plays an increasingly significant role in shaping the region’s future.¹⁴⁹

3.6 China-Pakistan Relations: Strategic Alliances and Domestic Politics

Under the Xi Jinping administration, the influence of China on Pakistan's domestic politics has grown considerably, especially through the deepening economic ties established under CPEC. While China’s policy of non-interference has kept much of its involvement discreet, the economic and strategic significance of CPEC has brought the bilateral relationship to the forefront of Pakistan’s political discourse. The Pakistani elite, such as the military and political leadership, have largely framed CPEC as a vital project for revitalising the country’s struggling economy. However, this narrative has sparked demands for greater transparency in the agreements with China as concerns about long-term fiscal implications, so-called ‘debt traps’, and claims of neo-imperialism have emerged. Moreover, marginalised regions, such as Balochistan, have voiced strong opposition not directly to China but to what is perceived as an unequal distribution of CPEC-related benefits, with some nationalist factions decrying it as an extension of neo-colonialism.¹⁵⁰

China’s engagement with Pakistan is shaping internal political dynamics, particularly through the military’s increasing involvement in CPEC. The military, responsible for securing

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁴⁸ Hasan Yaser Malik, “Strategic Importance of Gwadar Port,” *Journal of Political Studies* 19, no. 2 (2012): 63-79.

¹⁴⁹ Masood Khalid and Amina Rashid, “Pakistan’s Strategic Potential in the Regional Context,” *Strategic Studies* 38, no. 3 (2018): 179-186.

¹⁵⁰ Sadia Tasleem, “Internal Drivers-The Nexus between Domestic Politics and Bilateral Relations: Exploring India-Pakistan, Pakistan-China, and China-India Dynamics,” *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 5, no. 2 (2022): 315-335.

CPEC projects, has used its influence to play a central role in planning and operationalising these initiatives. Some scholars argue that this has led to the strengthening of Pakistan as a ‘garrison state’, where military power has grown disproportionately.¹⁵¹ This dynamic could exacerbate existing tensions between the central government and the peripheral regions, as the military’s control over CPEC-related security and infrastructural projects increases. As China relies on Pakistan to safeguard its investments and prevent militant activity, the military’s ability to deliver on its security commitments will be critical. However, this raises broader questions about how Islamic political parties, militant organisations and the public will react to the growing Chinese presence, especially as issues like the alleged mistreatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang gain more visibility.¹⁵²

The strategic importance of Pakistan to China in terms of the economic development of the Xinjiang region and the success of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) adds further complexity to domestic political dynamics. Pakistan’s public silence on the Uyghur issue is essential in maintaining smooth diplomatic relations with China, as anti-Chinese sentiment in the broader Muslim world could jeopardise key development projects.¹⁵³ Moreover, any failure in CPEC would not only be politically damaging for Pakistan’s leadership but could also undermine China’s credibility as a global economic power.¹⁵⁴ The success of CPEC is critical for both nations: for China, it serves as a barometer of the BRI’s viability, and for Pakistan’s political elite, it is a strategic opportunity that they cannot afford to lose. While the partnership between China and Pakistan remains mutually beneficial, it is becoming increasingly entangled

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 326-329

¹⁵² Amina Faisal, “Pakistan-China Relations: Beyond CPEC,” *Journal of South Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (2019): 40-44.

¹⁵³ Greitens, Lee, and Yazici, “Counterterrorism and Preventive Repression,” 9-47.

¹⁵⁴ Tasleem, “Internal Drivers,” 317-328.

with domestic political challenges that are likely to shape the internal and external trajectories of both countries.¹⁵⁵

3.7 Impact of Global Political Changes: China-Pakistan Relations and the New World Order

In the context of the evolving world order under Xi Jinping, China's expanding global influence highlights Pakistan's strategic role as a key ally in promoting regional stability and challenging Western dominance within the Global South. The partnership between Pakistan and China is shaped by the shifting dynamics of international politics, particularly with the rise of a multipolar world and the increasing relevance of platforms such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS). As member states promote deeper economic cooperation and advocate the use of local currencies in trade, the longstanding dominance of the US dollar is gradually being contested.¹⁵⁶ This transition not only alters global trade patterns but also resonates with Pakistan's strategic interest in exploring alternatives to Western financial systems which have historically limited its economic autonomy. In this context, the deepening of Sino-Pakistani relations reflects a broader movement aimed at building resilience against Western hegemony and advancing the Global South's aspirations for economic agency and a more balanced global order.

Similarly, CPEC epitomises the convergence of regional ambitions within the strategic environment shaped by the SCO. As a key member of the SCO, Pakistan plays a vital role in supporting China's vision of regional connectivity and economic integration across Central and South Asia. This partnership is not merely transactional; it is grounded in shared security concerns such as combating terrorism and promoting stability in a region marked with

¹⁵⁵ Bashir and Gul, "Countering Terrorism," 71-83.

¹⁵⁶ Saeedeh Moradifar and Enayatollah Yazdani, "The Explanation of Effect and Role of BRICS on New World Order," *Strategic Studies of Public Policy* 7, no. 23 (2017): 43-60.

persistent geopolitical tensions. The SCO, with its emphasis on mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference, offers a platform for Pakistan and China to address shared challenges posed by external actors, thereby enhancing their strategic leverage in regional diplomacy.¹⁵⁷ The CPEC and its alignment with SCO objectives represent a strategic shift towards collaborative economic development, positioning Pakistan as a linchpin in China's broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

However, the implications of this alliance extend beyond economic cooperation, prompting a re-evaluation of Pakistan's diplomatic strategies towards its neighbours and the wider international community. The need for a comprehensive reform agenda within institutions such as the United Nations is critical in this context, as Pakistan continues to advocate for equitable representation and decision-making processes that reflect the interests of developing nations. This reformist approach aligns with the broader aspirations of the Global South, which seeks to amplify its voice in international governance structures that have traditionally favoured the Western powers. As Pakistan deepens its engagement with China and other BRICS-aligned nations, it positions itself as a conduit for promoting systemic change, thereby enhancing its diplomatic standing and influence within global forums.¹⁵⁸

In conclusion, the evolving Sino-Pakistani relationship reflects broader transformations in the international system, for instance, the emergence of a multipolar world order shaped by regional alliances and shifting power dynamics.¹⁵⁹ As Pakistan deepens its partnership with China, it must carefully manage the implications for domestic political sovereignty, institutional autonomy and public sentiment in light of concerns surrounding foreign influence. The convergence of economic initiatives such as CPEC, strategic partnerships like those within

¹⁵⁷ Khalid and Rashid, "Pakistan's Strategic Potential," 179-186.

¹⁵⁸ Moradifar and Yazdani, "The Explanation of Effect and Role," 43-60.

¹⁵⁹ Vandewalle, "Pakistan and China," 1-15.

the SCO and BRICS and the pursuit of reform in global governance structures illustrate the complex interdependencies influencing Pakistan's foreign policy direction. Moving forward, Pakistan's ability to balance its strategic cooperation with China against internal political challenges and external diplomatic expectations will be crucial. Ultimately, this relationship, framed by evolving global dynamics, will significantly shape Pakistan's trajectory in economic development, national security and its quest for a more prominent and autonomous role in international affairs.

3.8 Conclusion

The political dimensions of Pakistan-China relations, shaped by a legacy of diplomatic engagement, military cooperation and responses to shifting global power structures, illustrate a multidimensional partnership with far-reaching implications for regional and international affairs. Between 2013 and 2023, under Xi Jinping's leadership, Pakistan's foreign policy towards China underwent a calculated recalibration. This period witnessed the deepening of bilateral ties through high-level diplomacy, enhanced defence collaboration and a strong commitment to economic integration, most notably through CPEC. Despite external pressures, internal opposition and security concerns, the partnership has demonstrated resilience while reaffirming its central role in South Asia's evolving geopolitical landscape.

Significantly, the Xi era also ushered in broader strategic alignment through military coordination, defence technology transfers and shared positions on key regional issues such as the Kashmir conflict and counterterrorism. In multilateral platforms, both nations have increasingly presented a united diplomatic front, reinforcing mutual interests in the face of Western influence and Indian regional aspirations. This alignment reflects a growing level of political trust by cementing the relationship with strategic depth and multidimensional cooperation.

Furthermore, as global power shifts intensify amid growing US-China rivalry and the expansion of initiatives like BRI, Pakistan finds itself navigating a delicate balance between opportunity and vulnerability. China's global outreach has provided Islamabad with economic and strategic leverage, but it has also introduced concerns around policy autonomy, debt sustainability and sovereignty. This chapter has illustrated that the political relationship, while beneficial, must be carefully managed within the context of both regional volatility and global systemic transitions.

Overall, the Sino-Pakistani political relationship during the Xi Jinping era stands as a case study in contemporary strategic diplomacy rooted in history but shaped by the pressing challenges and opportunities of a transforming world order. Its future trajectory will depend not only on continued bilateral cooperation but also on Pakistan's ability to maintain agency and stability amid the evolving dynamics of international politics.

CHAPTER FOUR: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS

4.1 Introduction

The socio-economic dimensions of Pakistan-China relations have gained increasing strategic importance in recent years, particularly under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. His tenure has witnessed a significant deepening of bilateral cooperation, most notably through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁶⁰ CPEC has not only restructured economic engagement but also encouraged greater social and cultural interaction between the two countries. This chapter highlights the pivotal role CPEC has played in transforming Pakistan's infrastructure, energy sector and broader economy. It also considers the wider implications of these developments within the context of shifting global power dynamics. Under the ambitious framework of the BRI, Xi Jinping's administration has strategically positioned Pakistan as a key partner in China's global vision, making the socio-economic relationship between the two countries a cornerstone of their evolving alliance.

This chapter explores the transformative impact of CPEC and its influence on Pakistan's economic landscape. Xi's administration has prioritised infrastructural development and regional connectivity as central pillars of BRI, with Pakistan benefiting significantly from investments in Special Economic Zones (SEZs), energy projects, and trade infrastructure.¹⁶¹

The analysis also examines how China's expanding engagement in Pakistan's energy sector has helped in mitigating chronic energy shortages.¹⁶² At the same time, it has fostered

¹⁶⁰ Hameed "The politics of the China-Pakistan economic corridor," 1-10.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 30

¹⁶² Mahmood, Taimur, and Sohail Ahmad. "CPEC Energy Projects: A Catalyst to Overcome Energy Crisis in Pakistan." *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 2 (2021): 34-45.

collaboration in renewable energy, reflecting a shared commitment to long-term sustainability. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China's economic strategy in Pakistan has become increasingly intertwined with broader geopolitical objectives. In this context, CPEC serves as a powerful symbol of the strategic alignment between the two countries in terms of shifting global power dynamics and intensifying US-China competition.

In addition to economic cooperation, this chapter examines the socio-cultural dimensions of the Pakistan-China relationship, which have been further solidified during President Xi Jinping's tenure. People-to-people exchanges, academic collaborations and joint educational initiatives such as the establishment of Confucius Institutes in Pakistan have contributed to deepening cultural ties and mutual understanding.¹⁶³ Xi's emphasis on soft power extends beyond economic engagement, promoting tourism, media partnerships and educational exchanges that support a more holistic bilateral relationship. These initiatives have nurtured a generation of Pakistanis with growing familiarity with China's language, culture, and international perspective, thereby reinforcing the socio-cultural foundation of the broader strategic alliance between the two countries.

Furthermore, Xi Jinping's administration has facilitated the expansion of healthcare cooperation, social development programmes and poverty alleviation initiatives in Pakistan, reflecting a comprehensive approach to bilateral relations.¹⁶⁴ These socio-economic efforts have not only supported Pakistan's development but also aligned with China's broader objective of promoting regional stability and collaboration. This chapter offers a detailed analysis of how these socio-economic dimensions, under Xi Jinping's leadership, are essential

¹⁶³ Muhammad Adnan Haidar and Fang Qi, "China-Pakistan Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation under Belt & Road Initiative," *Siazga Research Journal* 2, no. 3 (July 2023): 186-191, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375746515_China-Pakistan_Cultural_Exchanges_and_Cooperation_under_Belt_Road_Initiative.

¹⁶⁴ Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, *Pakistan-China Relations in the Changing Regional and Global Scenario* (Islamabad: Pakistan-China Institute, 2021), 12-15.

to understanding the growing significance of Pakistan-China relationship within the evolving global order as China's global influence continues to expand.

4.2 Bilateral Economic Cooperation: Trade, Investment and Infrastructure

Bilateral economic cooperation between China and Pakistan has expanded rapidly over the years, primarily through trade, investment and infrastructure development initiatives under CPEC. One of the most prominent features of this collaboration is the emphasis on enhancing regional connectivity and fostering economic integration.¹⁶⁵ Historically, the Karakoram Highway and the ancient Silk Road played vital roles in linking the Upper Indus Basin with the Tarim Basin in eastern Central Asia, facilitating cross-regional trade and interaction. These historic routes served as precursors to modern corridors such as CPEC, which now aims to connect China's Xinjiang province with Gwadar in southern Pakistan over a distance of approximately 2,700 kilometres.¹⁶⁶ This transformative infrastructural initiative, a central component of BRI, indicates the strategic value of transport networks in strengthening economic ties and promoting shared prosperity across the region.

CPEC, conceived as a multi-phase initiative, is designed to address Pakistan's infrastructural constraints while simultaneously enhancing regional connectivity. In its first phase, spanning from 2014 to 2020, CPEC prioritised the resolution of critical issues such as energy shortages and a lack of modern infrastructure. During this period, substantial investments were directed towards road development, information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, and power generation projects, collectively targeting Pakistan's immediate development needs. Gwadar, a strategic port city on Pakistan's southern coast, emerged as a central focus, with concerted efforts made to transform it into a hub of

¹⁶⁵ Faqeer Muhammad, Saranjam Baig, Khalid Mehmood Alam, and Attaullah Shah, eds., *Silk Route Revisited: Essays and Perspectives on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Beyond* (Gilgit-Baltistan: China Study Centre, Karakoram International University, 2023), 15-18.

¹⁶⁶ CPEC Secretariat, *CPEC Fact Book 2019* (Islamabad: Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform, 2020), 9-11.

trade and economic activity. The reconstruction and expansion of the Karakoram Highway further strengthened regional connectivity, facilitating cross-border trade between China and Pakistan, and serving as a crucial component of China's geopolitical strategy in Asia.¹⁶⁷

The second phase of CPEC, spanning from 2021 to 2025, is broader in scope and strategically oriented towards deepening economic integration between the two nations. Key areas of development in this phase include trade and market access, industrial expansion, socio-economic uplift, agricultural modernisation and the promotion of the blue economy in Gwadar.¹⁶⁸ SEZs are being developed to stimulate industrial growth, attract foreign investment and enhance export capacity. CPEC has also prioritised the modernisation of agriculture through the adoption of advanced technologies, aimed at increasing productivity and addressing Pakistan's food security challenges. Gwadar's proposed Oil City and the expansion of coastal tourism are expected to yield further economic benefits, positioning the city as a regional trade and energy hub. This phase represents a major transition, focusing not only on physical infrastructure but also on human capital development, poverty reduction and economic diversification, signalling a shift towards more sustainable and inclusive growth.¹⁶⁹

During 2026-2030, the final phase of CPEC will focus on consolidating the achievements of earlier phases and promoting sustainable development.¹⁷⁰ Infrastructural upgrades accomplished during previous phases are expected to result in higher trade volumes, industrial production and regional interconnectedness.¹⁷¹ Moreover, CPEC's economic zones are poised to evolve into global value chain hubs, generating additional employment, facilitating technology transfer and enabling Pakistani industries to become more competitive

¹⁶⁷ CPEC Secretariat, *CPEC Fact Book 2019*, 13.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 22-27.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 28-30.

¹⁷⁰ CPEC Secretariat, *CPEC Quarterly Magazine*, vol. 3 (Islamabad: Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform, 2019), 30-34.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 35-38.

in the international market. The initiative will also strengthen Pakistan's connectivity with key markets across Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, thereby integrating the country more firmly into global trade networks. This phase is essential to ensure that CPEC's benefits endure and that Pakistan fully realises the advantages of increased foreign direct investment, higher exports and a more diversified industrial base.¹⁷²

In tandem with these ambitious infrastructural developments, CPEC and BRI have remained central to Pakistan's efforts to tackle its economic challenges. The corridor not only addresses Pakistan's energy deficit and infrastructural requirements but also serves as a platform for enhancing regional connectivity.¹⁷³ These developments have led to new job opportunities, skill development initiatives and the establishment of educational and healthcare facilities, consequently contributing to human development in Pakistan.¹⁷⁴ However, despite these apparent economic advantages, several challenges persist, particularly in addressing environmental concerns, correcting trade imbalances and navigating the geopolitical complexities associated with the ongoing US-China rivalry.¹⁷⁵ Nonetheless, the economic cooperation between Pakistan and China continues to reflect deepening interdependence, underpinned by shared objectives of regional stability, sustained economic growth and mutual prosperity.¹⁷⁶

As CPEC progresses through its phases, it serves as a testament to the enduring strategic partnership between Pakistan and China.¹⁷⁷ The economic initiatives, specifically infrastructure and trade-related projects, have already reshaped Pakistan's economic

¹⁷² Weidong, "Pakistan-China Relations," 4-6.

¹⁷³ Vandewalle, "Pakistan and China," 5-11.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 8-10

¹⁷⁵ Khalid, "Pakistan-China Relations," 1-9; and Vandewalle, "Pakistan and China," 3-13.

¹⁷⁶ Khalid Mahmood, "Pakistan-China Relations: An Enduring Strategic Partnership," *Strategic Studies* 38, no. 2 (2018): 1-9; Vandewalle, "Pakistan and China," 3-13.

¹⁷⁷ Khalid Mahmood and Rizwana Rashid, "Pakistan's Strategic Potential: The Role of CPEC in Enhancing Pakistan's Geopolitical Standing," *Strategic Studies* 39, no. 2 (2019): 182-185.

environment and hold the potential to bring about even more significant transformations in the coming years. Historic trade routes, such as the ancient Silk Road and the Karakoram Highway, have evolved into modern-day economic corridors, highlighting the critical role of transport infrastructure in facilitating regional economic cooperation. With CPEC serving as a gateway to prosperity, the China-Pakistan bilateral relationship is expected to continue flourishing while paving the way for enhanced regional connectivity and economic integration that benefits not only the two nations but also the broader region.¹⁷⁸

4.3 CPEC: Fuelling Economic Growth and Energy Security, and Cooperation

Energy security is vital to Pakistan's economic development which currently faces an energy deficit of approximately 6,000-7,000 MW.¹⁷⁹ This persistent deficit has significantly disrupted social life and economic productivity nationwide. As a component of China's BRI, CPEC represents a substantial investment of \$62 billion, with \$34 billion earmarked specifically for the energy sector. This investment is essential in addressing Pakistan's energy needs while offering a comprehensive strategy to enhance power generation capacity.¹⁸⁰

Key projects funded or constructed by Chinese firms include major coal-fired power plants such as the 1,320 MW Sahiwal, Port Qasim, and Hub plants in Balochistan. These facilities play a critical role in supporting the national grid and are intended to alleviate existing energy shortages. In addition, CPEC has facilitated the development of renewable energy projects, such as wind farms including the 50 MW Hydro China Dawood Wind Farm and the 100 MW UEP Wind Farm located in Jhimpir, Thatta, along with major hydropower initiatives, including the 720 MW Karot and 884 MW Suki Kinari projects in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

¹⁷⁸ Zhang Weidong, "Pakistan-China Relations: A Strategic Partnership," *Contemporary International Relations* 27, no. 3 (2017): 2-7.

¹⁷⁹ Syed Waqas Haider Bukhari, Musarrat Jabeen, and Qaim Raza Jaffry, "Energy Dynamics of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)," *Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad* 36, no. 3 (2018): 99-100.

¹⁸⁰ Alfred L. Chan, *Xi Jinping: Political Career, Governance, and Leadership, 1953-2018* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 408-410.

Furthermore, the establishment of transmission infrastructure, such as the ± 660 kV Matiari–Lahore HVDC transmission line with a transmission capacity of 4,000 MW, has significantly enhanced the reliability and capacity of Pakistan’s national energy network.¹⁸¹

CPEC’s energy portfolio emphasises a blend of renewable and non-renewable sources to ensure a balanced, sustainable and reliable energy mix. The emphasis on renewable energy forms part of a broader strategy to optimise local resources and enhance national energy security. Collaboration on renewable energy projects addresses immediate energy demands while aligning with long-term sustainability objectives. The integration of wind, solar and hydroelectric power is critical for transitioning towards greener energy solutions and contributing to the mitigation of environmental impacts while reducing energy deficits.¹⁸²

In this context, Pakistan is expected to request that Chinese-operated power plants transition from importing to locally sourcing coal from the Thar region. This initiative aims at lowering energy costs and advancing sustainable development by utilising previously underexploited domestic coal resources. The now fully operational Thar Coal Block-I project generates 1,320 megawatts of electricity, supplying approximately 9 billion kilowatt-hours annually, which is enough to power nearly 4 million households.¹⁸³

Beyond coal and renewable energy projects, China plays a significant role in Pakistan’s nuclear energy programme, which is vital for diversifying Pakistan’s energy portfolio. This cooperation is underpinned by safety, regulatory and diplomatic considerations, ensuring that the development of nuclear energy aligns with international norms and standards. Thus, this

¹⁸¹ CPEC Secretariat, "Energy Projects Under CPEC," accessed March 16, 2024, <https://cpec.gov.pk/energy>.

¹⁸² Bukhari, Jabeen, and Jaffry, "Energy Dynamics of CPEC," 99-122.

¹⁸³ Yi Wang, "China-Pakistan Energy Cooperation Yields New Prospects for Local Economy," *Global Times*, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202407/1316498.shtml>.

partnership enhances Pakistan's energy security and provides a foundation for sustainable growth.¹⁸⁴

The socio-economic dimension of CPEC plays a significant role in shaping development outcomes for both China and Pakistan by addressing critical development needs, fostering regional economic integration, and generating employment opportunities. Cooperation in the energy sector contributes not only to Pakistan's economic growth but also to the strengthening of people-to-people ties through collaborative projects, which reflect a shared commitment to inclusive and mutual prosperity. Despite challenges and criticism from certain Western media outlets, the ongoing collaboration continues to enhance energy supply and contribute positively to the economic development of both nations and the wider region.¹⁸⁵

4.4 Strengthening Bilateral Ties through Socio-Cultural Exchanges: The China-Pakistan Experience

Interpersonal interactions and educational exchanges constitute a crucial component of the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and China. These exchanges are instrumental in fostering greater understanding and cooperation extending beyond political and economic realms, thereby reinforcing the socio-cultural fabric of their relations. Initiatives such as cultural exchange programmes and educational collaborations have played a significant role in advancing mutual understanding and cultural diplomacy. As individuals from both countries engage through various platforms, they contribute to a shared narrative that fosters mutual respect, tolerance and enduring friendship. This cultural diplomacy not only enriches both

¹⁸⁴ Bukhari, Jabeen, and Jaffry, "Energy Dynamics of CPEC," 99-122.

¹⁸⁵ Maham Hameed, "The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," *Journal of Contemporary Studies* 6, no. 2 (2017): 1-10.

societies but also lays the foundation for a deeper, more resilient partnership capable of addressing shared challenges and opportunities in the region.¹⁸⁶

Socio-cultural exchanges between China and Pakistan have expanded considerably, supported by a growing number of educational and cultural initiatives.¹⁸⁷ These interactions have established a platform for cooperation that goes beyond economic cooperation, engaging with deeper human connections and shared cultural experiences. The educational and cultural ties that have emerged through this collaboration demonstrate a shared vision of mutual prosperity and sustainable development.¹⁸⁸ As educational programmes and cultural interactions gain momentum, opportunities for strengthening bilateral ties continue to grow. The impact of these exchanges is evident in the flourishing links between communities, laying the groundwork for a more cohesive and harmonious bilateral relationship.

Tourism development represents another key facet of the socio-cultural exchange between China and Pakistan, which has been significantly influenced by improved travel and transport connectivity. The geographical proximity, facilitated by routes such as the 1,878-kilometre corridor stretching from the Khunjerab Pass to Gwadar, is poised to enhance tourism flows between the two nations.¹⁸⁹ CPEC not only seeks to stimulate economic growth but also opens up significant tourism opportunities along the historic Silk Road which is celebrated for its striking natural landscapes and rich cultural heritage. With Pakistan's impressive array of high peaks, including K2 and five other mountains exceeding 8,000 metres, the country has emerged as a destination of choice for mountaineers and adventure enthusiasts from around the

¹⁸⁶ "Education as a Tool of China-Pakistan Engagement," *The Local Roots of Chinese Engagement in Pakistan*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2021.

¹⁸⁷ Raffaello Pantucci and Abdullah Dayo, *Cultural Crossings: China's Soft Power in Pakistan*, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), December 2022, 3-6.

¹⁸⁸ Carnegie Endowment, "Education as a Tool," June 2021.

¹⁸⁹ Zaheer Ahmed, Takaaki Nihei, and Najaf Ali, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): A Long-Term Sustainable Development Project, Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism Sector in Pakistan," *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2025): 419-430.

world. In recent years, tourist arrivals have increased significantly, signifying the mutual benefits of enhanced connectivity and tourism infrastructure.¹⁹⁰

Educational exchanges and collaborations between Pakistan and China have played a central role in promoting cultural ties and laying the foundation for sustained future cooperation.¹⁹¹ Such partnerships are instrumental in addressing educational disparities and nurturing a generation equipped to navigate the complexities of a globalised world. Initiatives such as student exchange programmes and academic partnerships have contributed to an enriching educational experience that enables individuals to develop deeper insights into one another's cultures.¹⁹² Despite certain challenges, particularly within specific cultural segments of Pakistan, the commitment to strengthening educational ties remains firm. The CPEC initiative has further facilitated these cooperative efforts, especially in the areas of higher education and cultural tourism, therefore enhancing public diplomacy while strengthening people-to-people engagement.

The establishment of various cultural institutions and initiatives demonstrates a strong dedication to fostering socio-cultural cooperation between Pakistan and China.¹⁹³ Through initiatives such as the establishment of Pak-China Friendship Centres, the creation of Confucius Institutes, and the increasing enrolment of Pakistani students in Chinese universities, the framework for a more robust partnership is being established.¹⁹⁴ Notably, the Sindh provincial government's initiative to make Chinese language instruction compulsory from grade six

¹⁹⁰ Maria Zulfaqar et al., "The Mediating Roles of Economic, Socio-Cultural, and Environmental Factors to Predict Tourism Market Development by Means of Regenerative Travel: An Infrastructural Perspective of CPEC," *Sustainability* 15, no. 6 (2023): e5025-1-e5025-15.

¹⁹¹ Taj Kamran and Hussan Ara Magsi, "China-Pakistan Educational and Cultural Cooperation Under BRI," *Pacific International Journal* 6, no. S1 (2022): 40-50.

¹⁹² Muhammad Shahbaz, Ayesha Siddiqui, and Bilal Ahmed, "The Role of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Strengthening Education and Cultural Exchange," *Global Social Sciences Review* 5, no. 4 (2020): 223-230.

¹⁹³ Muhammad Ibrar, Jianining Mi, and M. Rafiq, "China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Socio-Cultural Cooperation and Its Impact on Pakistan," in *Proceedings of the 5th EEM International Conference on Education Science and Social Science (EEM-ESSS 2016)*, 179-183 (Sydney, Australia, 2016).

¹⁹⁴ Khan, "Pak-China Economic Corridor," 43-60.

onwards illustrates efforts to enhance intercultural understanding. Moreover, this growing trend of educational and cultural exchanges not only strengthens bilateral relations but also contributes to a broader regional dialogue, drawing on shared historical ties and common aspirations for mutual development. Thus, the continued emphasis on educational and cultural collaboration underscores the vital role of socio-cultural exchanges in fostering an enduring bilateral friendship.¹⁹⁵

4.5 Health, Social, and Environmental Impact of China-Pakistan Relations

As a crucial part of BRI, CPEC represents a transformative endeavour aimed at growing economic connectivity between China and Pakistan while also enhancing cooperation in the health and medical sectors.¹⁹⁶ Central to this collaboration is the provision of Chinese medical aid to Pakistan, which includes a variety of healthcare projects designed to improve public health outcomes.¹⁹⁷ These initiatives are vital in addressing Pakistan's pressing healthcare challenges, particularly in underserved regions. By incorporating Chinese expertise and resources within Pakistan's healthcare infrastructure, the CPEC initiative facilitates the development of medical facilities and services to improve the overall quality of healthcare nationwide. This alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3 (ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all), highlights the broader potential of CPEC in positively impacting the regional health sector.¹⁹⁸

Collaboration in public health represents another significant avenue of CPEC's broader health cooperation framework. Joint efforts between Chinese and Pakistani health authorities

¹⁹⁵ Sadaf Butt, Muhammad Rizwan, and Muhammad Naveed Akhtar, "A Study of Pakistan-China Collaboration for the Elevation of Higher Education," *International Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no. 2 (2023): 1-15

¹⁹⁶ Murad Ali, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Tapping Potential to Achieve the 2030 Agenda in Pakistan," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 4, no. 2 (2018): 301-325.

¹⁹⁷ Muhammad Ovais et al., "Traditional Chinese Medicine Going Global: Opportunities for Belt and Road Countries: TCM Importance in the Context of Belt Road Initiative," *Proceedings of the Pakistan Academy of Sciences: B. Life and Environmental Sciences* 56, no. 3 (2019): 17-26.

¹⁹⁸ Ali, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," 301-325.

focus on disease prevention and control, improving healthcare services and infrastructural development. Such collaboration is important in tackling communicable diseases that threaten public health, as both nations benefit from the mutual exchange of knowledge and resources. The continued exchange of medical personnel and expertise further consolidates this partnership, contributing to the development of a resilient healthcare system in Pakistan. This collaborative approach not only strengthens the healthcare sector but also grows the mutual trust and solidarity between both countries, laying a foundation for broader cooperation across other domains. Additionally, the integration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), a centuries-old cornerstone of Chinese medical tradition, has gained renewed emphasis under the BRI framework. This development exemplifies the cultural and medical dimensions of the partnership, enriching local healthcare practices while deepening cross-cultural understanding between China and Pakistan.¹⁹⁹

Moreover, the revival of TCM aligns with the broader objectives of BRI, positioning CPEC as a platform for the exchange of traditional knowledge and practices. As TCM gains recognition in Pakistan, it brings a holistic approach to health by integrating modern and traditional medicinal systems. This amalgamation not only enhances access to healthcare but also promotes better comprehension of diverse healing methodologies, contributing to the overall well-being of communities. In addition, CPEC encompasses significant social development projects aimed at uplifting underprivileged communities and addressing pressing socio-economic challenges in Pakistan. Initiatives such as poverty alleviation programmes, launched in 2015 in parallel with the SDGs, are designed to reduce poverty and improve living standards through targeted welfare schemes. These community development efforts span both rural and urban settings, significantly impacting local populations by providing essential

¹⁹⁹ Ovais et al., “Traditional Chinese Medicine,” 17-26.

services and infrastructure. Such initiatives are in harmony with the United Nations 2030 Agenda, extending their relevance beyond Pakistan to the broader South Asian region.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, environmental cooperation constitutes an important component of the CPEC, as joint initiatives in environmental protection and sustainability highlight the importance of preserving ecological balance amid rapid economic development. This collaboration is necessitated by the environmental challenges associated with large-scale infrastructural projects under the BRI. A study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) accentuates the environmental toll of CPEC, noting a rise in ecological risks linked to its implementation. Effectively addressing these challenges requires both countries to systematically integrate environmental considerations into project planning and processes. By aligning CPEC-related developments with the United Nations SDGs, the initiative not only aims to transform Pakistan's socio-economic landscape but also seeks to promote a sustainable bilateral partnership. This comprehensive approach positions CPEC as a catalyst for integrated progress in healthcare, social welfare and environmental sustainability, ensuring that "no one is left behind," as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In doing so, it sets a precedent for future collaborative efforts across the broader South Asian region.²⁰¹

4.6 Challenges and Issues: An Analysis

The economic relationship between China and Pakistan, particularly through initiatives like the BRI and CPEC, presents notable challenges due to economic dependencies and imbalances. As CPEC flourishes, there is a growing concern regarding Pakistan's economic sovereignty and its increasing reliance on China.²⁰² This dependency could result in a lack of leverage for Pakistan in future negotiations, potentially leaving it vulnerable to unfavourable

²⁰⁰ Ali, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," 301-325.

²⁰¹ Yen Chiang Chang, M. Jahanzeb Butt, and Khadija Zulfiqar, "A Comparative Analysis of the Environmental Policies in China and Pakistan: Developing a Legal Regime for Sustainable China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)," *IPRI Journal* 21, no. 1 (2021): 82-122.

²⁰² Bencivelli and Tonelli, *China's International Projection*, 26.

terms that may exacerbate existing trade imbalances. Addressing these issues requires a critical evaluation of the economic structures being established under CPEC. Thus, Pakistan must prioritise diversifying its trade partnerships and developing strategies to foster local industries that can compete internationally.²⁰³ This will help mitigate the risks associated with economic dependency and ensure that the benefits of CPEC projects are equitably distributed within the country. Moreover, despite regional and global challenges, both countries must navigate these economic dynamics to maintain a balanced and mutually beneficial partnership.

Besides, cultural and social integration represents another significant challenge in the China-Pakistan relationship. While economic ties are being fortified through investment and infrastructural development, the integration of Chinese culture and people within Pakistani society presents hurdles that require urgent attention. In regions such as Balochistan, where CPEC projects are concentrated, internal challenges, including local resistance, cultural misunderstandings and security concerns, can hinder progress.²⁰⁴ There is often scepticism among the local populace regarding the influx of Chinese workers and businesses, which can lead to social friction and cultural tensions.²⁰⁵ Efforts to promote mutual respect and understanding through cultural exchange programmes, educational initiatives and community engagement are essential in overcoming these barriers. Enhancing dialogue between the two nations can foster a sense of shared purpose and respect, ensuring that cultural integration occurs in a manner that respects local traditions while embracing the benefits of globalisation.

Therefore, political and regulatory issues further complicate the landscape of socio-economic cooperation between China and Pakistan. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and regulatory

²⁰³ Maham Hameed, "The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," *Berkeley Political Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2020): 1-10.

²⁰⁴ Sehrawat, Vikas. "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance: CPEC and Beyond." *South Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2019): 42-49.

²⁰⁵ Mehtab Ali Shah, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Its Socio-Cultural Impacts on the Local People of Pakistan," *Journal of Political Studies* 26, no. 2 (2019): 223-235.

challenges can stall progress on CPEC projects, undermining the intended benefits of these initiatives. In Balochistan, these problems are compounded by security issues and political instability, therefore making it difficult to implement CPEC projects effectively.²⁰⁶ Navigating this complex political environment requires innovative strategies that address both administrative bottlenecks and the unique regional challenges. Pakistan must undertake comprehensive reforms to streamline its regulatory framework and enhance governance to facilitate smoother cooperation. This involves engaging in transparent dialogue with local communities, civil society, and various stakeholders to build trust and consensus around CPEC projects. By implementing effective governance strategies, Pakistan can not only enhance the efficacy of CPEC but also strengthen its position in the larger geopolitical landscape, addressing both domestic challenges and international scepticism regarding its partnership with China.

4.7 Conclusion

In summary, the socio-economic dimensions of Pakistan-China relations, specifically under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, have evolved into a multi-faceted partnership that extends beyond mere economic cooperation. The strategic collaboration between the two nations, driven primarily by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has significantly reshaped Pakistan's economic conditions by delivering critical infrastructure, enhancing energy security, and improving trade connectivity, all of which promise long-term benefits.

President Xi Jinping's vision, as embodied in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has positioned Pakistan as a key partner within China's broader geopolitical strategy. However, while the economic dividends are considerable, they are accompanied by pressing challenges, including concerns over economic dependency and the delicate task of preserving national

²⁰⁶ Syed Raza Ullah, Abdul Rauf, and Muhammad Ayaz, "CPEC in Balochistan: Prospects and Problems," *Global Social Sciences Review* 4, no. 1 (2019): 27-37.

sovereignty amidst increasing Chinese influence. This dynamic emphasises the complex balance Pakistan must strike between maximising the developmental benefits of Chinese investment and maintaining its economic autonomy.

Beyond the economic sphere, the deepening socio-cultural exchanges between Pakistan and China reflect a growing alignment in soft power diplomacy. Under President Xi Jinping's administration, there has been a deliberate focus on fostering people-to-people connections through academic partnerships, tourism, media collaboration and educational exchange programmes. These initiatives have strengthened mutual understanding and cultivated long-term goodwill, with a new generation of Pakistanis increasingly exposed to the Chinese language, culture and political thought. The socio-cultural dimensions of this bilateral relationship play a crucial role in making the partnership sustainable and resilient, transcending purely political and economic considerations. Furthermore, cooperation in healthcare and social development has reinforced this comprehensive engagement, illustrating that the relationship is not merely transactional but grounded in shared developmental aspirations.

Ultimately, the socio-economic collaboration between Pakistan and China, as explored in this chapter, represents a comprehensive model of bilateral cooperation within an increasingly complex global environment. As China continues its ascent as a global power, its relationship with Pakistan will remain a pivotal element of its regional and international strategy, particularly amidst shifting global power dynamics and the emergence of new alliances. While Pakistan stands to gain considerably from the opportunities presented through Chinese investments and initiatives, it must also remain vigilant of the implications of this relationship within the evolving international order. The enduring relevance of this partnership will hinge upon Pakistan's capacity to leverage these opportunities for sustainable development while simultaneously navigating the geopolitical and socio-economic challenges that accompany such a deep and transformative alliance.

CHAPTER FIVE: GEO-STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS OF PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The burgeoning relationship between Pakistan and China has emerged as a pivotal axis in the broader geopolitical calculus of South Asia and beyond, set against the backdrop of shifting global power dynamics.²⁰⁷ This chapter endeavours to examine the geo-strategic underpinnings of this bilateral alliance while focusing on its far-reaching implications for regional stability, economic integration and political balance. Pakistan's unique geostrategic positioning at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East,²⁰⁸ coupled with China's expanding global influence through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), underscores the significance of their partnership.²⁰⁹ This analysis situates Pakistan and China as integral players in realising the potential of regional connectivity, specifically through frameworks such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), and the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO).²¹⁰

The geo-strategic importance of Pakistan-China relations is further accentuated by the evolving security landscape of South Asia, shaped by the United States-China rivalry and India's growing influence in regional affairs.²¹¹ This chapter employs a comprehensive methodology, encompassing both historical context and contemporary geopolitical discourse,

²⁰⁷ Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis*, 1-12.

²⁰⁸ Syed Rifaat Hussain, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Regional Geopolitics," *Strategic Studies* 39, no. 2 (2019): 75-95.

²⁰⁹ Nadège Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017), 13-21.

²¹⁰ Thomas Saez, "SAARC and CPEC: Overlapping Regional Connectivity," *Asian Affairs* 52, no. 1 (2021): 67-82.

²¹¹ C. Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 231-248.

to elucidate the intricate strategies governing the relationship. Pakistan's calculated balancing act of maintaining relations with China while navigating its ties with the United States and India poses both opportunities and challenges, with profound implications for the equilibrium of regional geopolitics.²¹² Central to this analysis is Chinese President Xi Jinping's vision of a China-Pakistan Community of Shared Destiny, which espouses cooperation premised on mutual benefit and trust, transcending mere economic and military interests to foster deeper long-term strategic alignment.

Moreover, this chapter investigates various aspects of military collaboration, naval security and the critical economic corridors exemplified by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).²¹³ Far from being a purely economic venture, CPEC represents a vital geo-strategic initiative, offering China added connectivity to the Arabian Sea, thereby circumventing traditional maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca. It is imperative to consider how this increased beneficial connectivity also gives rise to geopolitical tensions, especially with regional actors such as India, Afghanistan and Iran. The strategic calculus of this partnership is thus a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it provides substantial gains for both nations and on the other, it engenders vulnerabilities stemming from economic dependencies, security threats and regional rivalries. This chapter seeks to provide a nuanced analysis of these complex dynamics, offering a thorough understanding of how Pakistan-China relations are shaped by the confluence of geo-strategic imperatives in a progressively multipolar world.

²¹² Iftikhar Khattak and Iftikhar Ullah, "Impact of US-China Rivalry on India, Pakistan, and Regional Stability," *Asian Security* 19, no. 3 (2024): 210-223.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 5-20

5.2 Strategic Location and Regional Dynamics

Pakistan's strategic location in South Asia has long rendered it an integral player in regional geopolitics, especially in its relationship with China. Its geographical position nestled between India, Afghanistan and China places it at the crossroads of South and Central Asia, while its proximity to the Persian Gulf elevates its significance in the wider geopolitical arena.²¹⁴ CPEC, initiated under Xi Jinping's administration and formally signed in 2015, signifies the centrality of Pakistan in China's regional strategy.²¹⁵ By providing China with direct access to the Indian Ocean through Gwadar Port, CPEC serves as a foundation for both economic integration and geo-strategic collaboration.²¹⁶ This partnership amplifies China's influence in South Asia and secures Pakistan's role as a key ally in Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), reflecting a pragmatic alignment of interests aimed at regional stability and shared economic growth.

The security landscape of South Asia remains deeply intertwined with Pakistan-China relations. In the post 9/11 era, as global security dynamics shifted, so did the strategic partnerships in the region. Under the Indo-US strategic partnership, India's growing alliance with the United States has complicated the balance of power in South Asia.²¹⁷ India's pursuit of regional dominance, bolstered by its ambitions for a blue-water navy, has increased tensions, particularly with Pakistan. In addition, Pakistan's strategic alignment with China has become increasingly critical due to the growing threat of Indian hegemony.²¹⁸ This relationship, further strengthened during Xi Jinping's administration, serves as a counterbalance to India's regional aspirations and helps to sustain a more multipolar balance of power. Thus, it can be said that

²¹⁴ Nida Shabbir, Imran Wakil, and Israr Rasool, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Change in the Geo-Strategic Outlook of Pak-China Relations," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 5, no. 2 (2021): 507.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 509.

²¹⁶ Sehrawat, "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance," 42-49.

²¹⁷ Harsh V. Pant, *The US-India Nuclear Pact: Policy, Process, and Great Power Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23-27.

²¹⁸ Asia Maqsood, "China-Pakistan Strategic Partnership and India's Regional Ambitions in South Asia," *Strategic Studies* 41, no. 3 (2021): 48-65.

through military cooperation, including nuclear collaboration and the development of both conventional and non-conventional weaponry, the Pakistan-China alliance plays a pivotal role in maintaining regional security.

In the complex geopolitics of the region, Pakistan has adopted a strategic balance between China and other neighbouring powers. As China expands its influence in the Indian Ocean and beyond, Pakistan's role as a key regional player has been reinforced. Its geo-strategic position at the nexus of South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East makes it an indispensable partner in China's geographical plan.²¹⁹ Under Xi Jinping's rule, China's evolving relationship with Iran, driven by pragmatic interests, further exemplifies Beijing's strategic balancing. While China's ties with Iran remain limited compared to its all-weather friendship with Pakistan, Beijing's pursuit of energy security and its ambition to counter the United States' influence in the Middle East highlight the multifaceted nature of its regional strategy.²²⁰ For Pakistan, this presents an opportunity to utilise China's growing military and economic clout to advance its interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

As the global order shifts away from a United States-led unipolar landscape towards a complex multipolar world, Pakistan's foreign policy must adapt to these evolving dynamics. The rise of China, alongside Russia's resurgence and Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy, signals the end of the United States' uncontested global dominance. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a flagship project, reflects its growing economic and strategic ambitions. Yet, even as the United States' hold wanes, neither China nor any other power is expected to replace it entirely. In this context, Pakistan's security and strategic interests are inextricably linked to its ability to navigate this

²¹⁹ Khalid Mahmood and Muhammad Rashid, "Pakistan's Strategic Potential in the Context of Regional Geopolitics," *Strategic Studies* 41, no. 2 (2021): 179-186.

²²⁰ Mehmood Hussain, Ahmed Bux Jamali, Rana Danish Nisar, and Abdulfattah Omar, "The China-Iran Strategic Deal and CPEC: Navigating the Influence of Pragmatic Balancing in China's Relations with Iran and Pakistan," *Politics & Policy* 52, no. 1 (2024): 227-244.

new world order. A nuanced balance between major powers, specifically between China and the United States will be crucial for Pakistan as it seeks to secure its place in an increasingly interconnected and competitive global landscape.²²¹

5.3 Military Cooperation and Security Alliances

Military cooperation between Pakistan and China has evolved significantly over the past few decades, driven by mutual interests in regional stability and security. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as part of the One Belt, One Road Initiative (now widely referred to as the Belt and Road Initiative), which not only facilitated economic ties but also deepened security interdependence between the two nations.²²² This partnership became particularly critical in the aftermath of the United States' hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, which provided both Pakistan and China with an opportunity to position themselves as peacemakers in Afghanistan and the surrounding region.²²³ A stable Afghanistan is essential for enhancing regional economic connectivity, reviving historical trade routes such as the Silk Road, and maintaining peace in South Asia. The joint efforts of Islamabad and Beijing to connect the region through economic corridors reflect their shared vision for stability and prosperity.

In terms of defence collaboration, notable advancements have been made in military technology and weaponry. The JF-17 Thunder fighter jet, jointly developed by Pakistan and China, began its development in 1999, with the first eight aircraft delivered between 2007 and 2008. By 2015, the Pakistan Air Force operated 60 of these aircraft, with ongoing production at the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex.²²⁴ In 2013, Pakistan commenced production of an

²²¹ Rizwana Abbasi, "Global Power Shift and Foreign Policy Choices for Pakistan," *Strategic Studies* 43, no. 1 (2023): 1-21.

²²² Chan, *Xi Jinping*, 380-386.

²²³ Liaqat, Bilal Bin, Ghulam Mustafa, and Imran Wakil. "Sino-Pakistan Relations and its Alliance Against Traditional Security Threats in the South Asian Security Environment," *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 5, no. 2 (2022): 372-390.

²²⁴ Chan, *Xi Jinping*, 380-386.

upgraded version of the JF-17 Thunder, showcasing the deepening of defence ties. This military cooperation is particularly significant in the context of deteriorating relations between China and India, marked by events such as the Doklam standoff and India's opposition to both the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).²²⁵ Pakistan and China's collaboration thus serves as a strategic counterbalance to the growing military capabilities of India and the increasing United States military footprint in the region developments which many analysts interpret as part of a broader effort to contain China's rise.

Intelligence sharing and counterterrorism are pivotal aspects of the military cooperation between Pakistan and China. The two countries have established various consultation mechanisms, including Strategic Dialogues at the Foreign Ministers' level and Political Consultations at the Foreign Secretary/Vice-Minister level. The two countries have established various consultation mechanisms, including Strategic Dialogues at the Foreign Ministers' level and Political Consultations at the Foreign Secretary/Vice-Minister level. These engagements facilitate the sharing of critical intelligence, enhancing the efficacy of joint counterterrorism efforts. In 2014, China exported military weapons worth \$394 million to Pakistan a figure that rose by 70 percent the following year to \$565 million.²²⁶ This increase in arms sales coincided with a significant reduction in United States arms sales to Pakistan, which declined from \$189 million in 2014 to just \$66 million in 2015. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), between 2013 and 2017, Pakistan emerged as the largest recipient of Chinese arms, accounting for 35 percent of China's total arms exports among 48 recipient

²²⁵ Liaqat, Mustafa, and Wakil, "Sino-Pakistan Relations," 372-390.

²²⁶ Muhammad Jawad Hashmi, Sobia Jamil, and Ashfaq Ahmed, "Pakistan-China Military and Security Ties: A Qualitative Analysis," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 3, no. 2 (2019): 284.

countries.²²⁷ These statistics underscore the depth of the military relationship and reinforce China's position as Pakistan's foremost arms supplier since 1991.

The strategic partnership between Pakistan and China extends beyond bilateral military cooperation to include participation in regional and global security forums. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) serves as a significant platform for both nations, enabling them to collaborate on broader security issues affecting the region. This alliance is particularly pertinent in light of increasing geopolitical tensions and the evolving security landscape in South Asia. The proximity of United States forces to Pakistan, along with India's advancing military capabilities, further complicates the regional security environment. As China expands its maritime presence in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and India enhances its nuclear capabilities, the strategic balance of power faces growing challenges. The close ties between Washington and New Delhi provide India with a distinct advantage, making the partnership between Pakistan and China crucial for maintaining regional stability and ensuring that both nations can effectively safeguard their interests amidst rising tensions.²²⁸

5.4 Maritime Security and Naval Cooperation

Maritime security has emerged as a critical domain of collaboration between China and Pakistan, particularly within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the strategic development of Gwadar Port. The significance of Gwadar Port cannot be overstated, as it is poised to enhance regional maritime trade and security by providing a pivotal access point to the Arabian Sea.²²⁹ The development of this port has not only facilitated new trade routes but has also positioned Pakistan as a strategic partner for China in safeguarding its

²²⁷ Pieter D. Wezeman et al., *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2017* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2018), 10-12, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/fssipri_at2017_0.pdf (accessed August 3, 2025).

²²⁸ Saud and Arif, "South Asian Geo-Politics," 6-10.

²²⁹ Yen-Chiang Chang and Mehran Idris Khan, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Maritime Security Collaboration: A Growing Bilateral Interest," *Maritime Business Review* 4, no. 2 (2019): 217-235.

maritime trade interests. Historically, maritime trade has been indispensable, with the majority of global commerce traversing oceanic routes, highlighting the importance of securing these channels. In addition to trade, offshore resources and coastal tourism associated with maritime development contribute significantly to national revenue and economic diversification. Given this strategic rationale, both countries face considerable challenges in ensuring maritime security, particularly in the face of rising regional tensions and the growing presence of competing naval powers in the Indian Ocean.

In the wake of increased maritime traffic through Gwadar Port, the Pakistan Navy has launched strategic initiatives, including the establishment of Special Task Force-88, dedicated to enhancing maritime security.²³⁰ The security of Gwadar Port is regarded as integral to the success of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), necessitating a multi-dimensional strategy to address evolving security threats. These measures include strengthening the capabilities of dedicated security personnel, conducting littoral exercises, and involving law enforcement agencies to promote maritime awareness across the region. However, persistent challenges such as human trafficking, piracy, and India's expanding naval presence in the Indian Ocean further complicate the regional maritime security environment. In response, the Pakistan Navy supported by China is concentrating on three core objectives: securing Gwadar Port, protecting Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), and ensuring the safety of commercial and naval vessels operating in these waters. As part of these ongoing efforts, Pakistan is expected to develop an independent maritime security doctrine aimed at effectively managing the emerging threats and safeguarding its strategic maritime interests.

²³⁰ Sadaf Bashir, Sumara Gul, and Muhammad Farrukh, *Maritime Security and the China-Pakistan Strategic Partnership: The Emerging Role of Task Force-88*, Institute of Regional Studies (Islamabad), Focus Report no. 45 (2023): 22-28.

The control of Gwadar is not merely a matter of enhancing trade; it also provides a strategic vantage point to monitor United States naval activities in the Persian Gulf and Indian naval operations, which are increasingly integrated with U.S. maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean.²³¹ The growing presence of Indian military capabilities, alongside the expanding U.S. military footprint in the region, present significant geopolitical challenges for both China and Pakistan, potentially destabilising the strategic balance of power in South Asia.²³² In response, China has adopted a revised maritime doctrine of "active defence," aimed at projecting naval power to safeguard its "maritime rights and interests" while ensuring the security of its broader national development goals.²³³ This policy highlights the critical importance of protecting Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) across the Indian Ocean, which are essential for China's energy imports and global trade routes.

The maritime security collaboration between China and Pakistan goes beyond promoting regional peace and political stability; it is also a critical component of China's broader geopolitical strategy. Through initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China seeks to safeguard its strategic interests and expand its influence over maritime and economic domains throughout the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The development of ports and coastal infrastructure, particularly Gwadar Port, is a calculated move to enhance China's maritime capabilities, allowing it to project power and secure access to crucial sea lanes stretching from the Arabian Sea through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean basin.²³⁴ The overarching objectives of this collaboration include the protection of key Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), which carry nearly 90 percent of China's trade and energy imports. By strengthening its maritime posture, China not only reinforces its position in the regional

²³¹ Maqsood, "China-Pakistan Strategic Partnership," 57.

²³² Paul Kapur, *India-US Strategic Cooperation: The Impact on Naval Power in the Indian Ocean Region* (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2022), 89.

²³³ Ryan D. Martinson, *China's Global Maritime Grand Strategy: Present and Future* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2020), 112-114.

²³⁴ Chang and Khan, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," 217-235.

balance of power but also bolsters its naval operational reach into the Arabian Sea and the wider Indian Ocean, aligning with its long-term strategic ambitions.

5.5 Strategic Economic Corridors

Strategic economic corridors most notably the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) constitute a vital component of contemporary geopolitical and economic strategies. Launched in September 2013 as a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), CPEC is designed to establish a comprehensive trade and transportation network linking Gwadar Port in Pakistan to Kashgar in China's Xinjiang region.²³⁵ This ambitious initiative not only aims to strengthen bilateral economic integration between China and Pakistan but also functions as a strategic bridge connecting Central Asia, the Gulf States, and East Africa. With multibillion-dollar investments across infrastructure, energy, and communication sectors, CPEC is poised to transform Pakistan's socioeconomic landscape, particularly in its underdeveloped regions, such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.²³⁶ By developing Gwadar into a major regional, commercial and logistics hub, the corridor is expected to generate employment opportunities, attract foreign direct investment, and stimulate economic growth across multiple sectors. Ultimately, CPEC enhances Pakistan's integration into the global economy and strengthens its connectivity with regional organisations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

The infrastructure and connectivity projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are integral to advancing regional trade and establishing a seamless

²³⁵ Syed Masood Khalid, "Pakistan's Evolving Relations with China: The Transformative Potential of CPEC," *Strategic Studies* 39, no. 2 (2021): 212-215.

²³⁶ Aiysha Safdar, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Maritime Geography and Regional Implications," *Strategic Studies* 35, no. 3 (2015): 17

transportation network. Core components of the initiative include the development of highways, railways, and energy infrastructure, all aimed at facilitating the efficient movement of goods and services across the region. These projects not only stimulate economic activity within Pakistan but also strengthen its connectivity with neighbouring countries, offering landlocked states, such as Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics, direct access to maritime trade routes. Strategically located approximately 250 miles from the Strait of Hormuz, Gwadar Port serves as a critical node in regional commerce, providing a cost-effective and logistically efficient distribution hub for energy resources and trade commodities.²³⁷ By integrating transportation systems and expanding critical infrastructure, CPEC aspires to cultivate a sustainable economic ecosystem that uplifts local communities, reduces regional disparities, and strengthens Pakistan's role in regional trade agreements.²³⁸ This includes greater engagement with organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) programme.

The strategic significance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) transcends economic considerations, carrying substantial geopolitical implications for both China and Pakistan. For China, CPEC functions as a critical component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), securing vital trade routes and energy supply lines while reinforcing its strategic ambitions.²³⁹ By strengthening connectivity with its western provinces, particularly Xinjiang, CPEC not only facilitates economic integration but also addresses internal security concerns and serves as a counterweight to India's regional influence, especially in light of India's collaboration with Iran in developing the Chabahar Port as a competing trade hub.

²³⁷ Khalid, "Pakistan's Evolving Relations," 214-216.

²³⁸ Safdar, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," 18-20.

²³⁹ Khalid and Muhammad Rashid, "Pakistan's Strategic Potential," 179-186.

For Pakistan, CPEC offers a strategic opportunity to capitalise on its geostrategic location, attract foreign investment, and accelerate economic development, particularly in underdeveloped regions. Additionally, the project contributes to regional stability amid growing tensions with India by anchoring Pakistan more deeply within regional and economic frameworks.²⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the initiative faces several challenges, including persistent security threats, internal political dynamics, and intensifying geopolitical rivalries. Addressing these concerns requires comprehensive and coordinated risk mitigation strategies.

Overall, strategic economic corridors such as CPEC have the potential to reshape regional and global economic orders by fostering connectivity, cooperation, and economic integration among regional groupings like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) programme, and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).²⁴¹ In doing so, CPEC advances the vision of a more interconnected and interdependent global landscape.

5.6 Influence of Global Strategic Changes: The New World Order

The evolving global order signals a transition from the US-led liberal unipolar system that has dominated international relations for decades. The rise of China as a global power, manifested through its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, presents a formidable challenge to American hegemony. This strategic rivalry is further intensified by Russia's geopolitical resurgence, the European Union's pursuit of strategic autonomy, and India's growing aspirations for regional and global influence. The contemporary geopolitical landscape is marked by instability in the Middle East and a pronounced pivot toward Asia,

²⁴⁰ Shabbir, Wakil, and Rasool, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," 510-512.

²⁴¹ S. M. Hali, Nasir H. Mirza, and Hanif Ur Rehman, "One Belt and One Road: CPEC and the Geo-Politics of South Asia," *Journal of Political Studies* 23, no. 1 (2016): 113-125.

indicating a shift towards multipolarity with many centres of power. As a result, the traditional role of the United States as the sole global leader in international governance is increasingly being questioned. The argument that American global dominance is in decline has gained significant traction in both scholarly and policy circles.²⁴² For Pakistan, these global realignments necessitate a recalibration of its foreign policy priorities. The country must navigate an increasingly complex international environment by maintaining balanced relationships with major powers while safeguarding its national interests. In this context, a nuanced and adaptive foreign policy is essential, one that effectively responds to the emerging multipolar world order and aligns Pakistan's strategic objectives with the shifting global power dynamics.

In the context of the Indo-US strategic partnership, Pakistan has found itself compelled to strengthen its ties with China to counterbalance India's ambitions. The post-9/11 era marked a significant shift in global political dynamics, leading to a more pronounced Indo-US alliance across various sectors, including security and defence. India's military modernisation and its pursuit of a blue-water navy under this partnership underscore its aspirations for regional dominance, posing a direct challenge to Pakistan's security-related interests.²⁴³ As India expands its resources and capabilities in cooperation with the United States, Pakistan acknowledges that it cannot adequately counter these developments on its own. Consequently, a strategic partnership with China has become crucial for Pakistan, serving to counter India's hegemonic ambitions in South Asia while contributing to regional stability. This partnership extends beyond military cooperation, encompassing economic collaboration through initiatives

²⁴² Abbasi, "Global Power Shift," 1-21.

²⁴³ Maqsood, "China-Pakistan Strategic Partnership," 48-52.

such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aims to strengthen Pakistan's infrastructure and bolster its economic resilience in the face of regional challenges.²⁴⁴

The broader implications of a new world order and the rise of China carry significant strategic challenges and risks for Pakistan. Geopolitical dynamics have positioned Pakistan at a crucial juncture, allowing it to serve as a conduit for China's energy and trade routes, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative. However, this partnership is not without its vulnerabilities. Potential security threats to the Pakistan-China relationship include regional instability, particularly stemming from India's strategic manoeuvres and tensions arising from China's increasingly assertive foreign policy under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These dynamics can strain bilateral relations if not managed carefully. Moreover, Pakistan faces the dilemma of maintaining balanced relations with other major powers, especially the United States and India. This situation demands astute diplomatic strategies to navigate complex interdependencies without compromising national sovereignty. As Pakistan deepens its economic engagement with China, it must remain vigilant about the strategic vulnerabilities associated with growing economic dependence, ensuring that its national interests continue to take precedence amid shifting global alliances.²⁴⁵

As the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) unfolds, it offers substantial geostrategic benefits for both Pakistan and China, positioning them at the centre of the emerging global economic landscape. The multi-billion-dollar investment in CPEC is designed to enhance Pakistan's infrastructure, address critical energy shortages, and stimulate economic growth, potentially increasing GDP by 1.5% between 2016 and 2020, with further growth projected through 2030. This corridor not only strengthens Pakistan's regional trade and connectivity but also serves as a crucial link in China's broader strategy to secure energy routes

²⁴⁴ Khalid and Muhammad Rashid, "Pakistan's Strategic Potential," 179-186.

²⁴⁵ Qadri and Qadri, "China-Pakistan Relations," 187-194.

from the Middle East and Africa, thereby optimising its supply chains.²⁴⁶ By facilitating trade and energy transport, CPEC is integral to China's objective of promoting economic integration across Asia and beyond, ensuring a stable resource supply while reducing logistical costs. However, the environmental challenges posed by these projects demand effective policy measures to mitigate their adverse impacts and ensure that development remains sustainable and aligned with Pakistan's long-term economic goals.²⁴⁷ In this context, ongoing global shifts, particularly the rise of a multipolar world order, compel Pakistan to adopt a nuanced foreign policy, one that balances strategic partnerships while confronting both domestic and regional challenges.

5.7 Conclusion

The geostrategic partnership between Pakistan and China, as comprehensively examined throughout this chapter, stands as a cornerstone of regional stability and a critical axis within the broader geopolitical landscape. Pakistan's geographical significance, providing China with an indispensable maritime gateway and a pivotal route through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), lies at the very heart of this evolving alliance. This relationship transcends conventional diplomacy, emerging as a complex network of economic, political, and military ties that have deepened in alignment with China's broader objectives under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While the partnership has undoubtedly driven infrastructural development within Pakistan and strengthened its connectivity to global markets, it also functions as a strategic buffer supporting China's interests in South and Central Asia. Nevertheless, the benefits of this cooperation are accompanied by considerable challenges, particularly in the context of escalating regional tensions and global rivalries, most notably with India and the United States.

²⁴⁶ *CPEC Quarterly Magazine*, 44-46.

²⁴⁷ Qadri and Qadri, "China-Pakistan Relations," 187-94.

The military and maritime collaboration between Pakistan and China further highlights the depth of their strategic engagement. Gwadar Port, a key component of China's maritime strategy, serves as a critical node for securing energy routes and enhancing trade flows. However, the port represents more than mere economic connectivity, it symbolises the mutual defence strategy pursued by both nations, exemplified through joint military exercises and shared intelligence frameworks. These efforts to secure maritime lanes and strengthen regional security, however, generate significant complications, particularly from India, which regards the expansion of Chinese influence through CPEC and Gwadar with considerable suspicion. The strategic competition between Gwadar and Iran's Chabahar Port, supported by India, adds yet another layer of complexity to an already tense regional security environment. The delicate balance that Pakistan must maintain between deepening its alliance with China and managing the diplomatic sensitivities of other global powers remain an ongoing strategic challenge.

In short, the geostrategic dimensions of Pakistan-China relations present both exceptional opportunities and significant risks. For Pakistan, the alliance offers economic revitalisation and serves as a strategic counterbalance to Indian influence. For China, Pakistan is a key partner in its pursuit of global prominence and regional influence. However, this relationship is not without vulnerabilities, most notably Pakistan's increasing economic dependence on Chinese investment and the persistent threat of regional instability, particularly in Balochistan. Additionally, the growing strategic rivalry between China and the United States, coupled with India's resistance to the widening reach of CPEC, continues to overshadow the partnership. Looking ahead, both nations must not only deepen their cooperation but also anticipate and skilfully navigate the shifting currents of global geopolitics. By doing so, they can bolster the resilience of their alliance and position it as a stable force within an increasingly volatile international order.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The investigation into Pakistan's foreign policy towards China during Xi Jinping administration (2013-2023) reveals a sophisticated and dynamic relationship that has undergone significant transformation in response to shifting geopolitical dynamics and regional imperatives. Historical analysis demonstrates a robust foundation of mutual support, grounded in strategic interests and exemplified by pivotal initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This partnership not only reflects increased economic collaboration through expanded trade and investment, but also signifies a deepening of political and military ties, fostering a coordinated effort to counterbalance the influence of regional adversaries, particularly India and the United States. While the alliance has delivered notable achievements, including substantial infrastructural development and enhanced socio-economic exchange, it also faces serious challenges. Institutional weaknesses, growing economic dependence, and persistent security vulnerabilities represent significant barriers that require critical policy attention and strategic foresight.

The complex interplay of these dynamics highlights the need for Pakistan to adopt a nuanced and strategic approach that balances its cooperative commitments with the preservation of national sovereignty, as both nations navigate the challenges of an increasingly competitive global environment. Therefore, moving forward, it is essential for Pakistan to not only strengthen its political and economic ties with China, but also prioritise sustainable development and transparent governance practices that ensure equitable outcomes for all stakeholders. Ultimately, the future trajectory of Pakistan-China relations will depend on both nations' ability to adapt to shifting geopolitical landscapes, while remaining firmly committed to their shared vision of regional stability and mutual prosperity.

6.1 Findings

The historical context of Pakistan-China relations establishes a strong foundation of mutual support and collaboration, significantly evolving since diplomatic ties were formally established in 1951. Key events, such as the Sino-Indian War of 1962, catalysed Pakistan's strategic alignment with China, positioning it as a counterbalance to Indian influence in the region. This partnership has matured through consistent military cooperation, expanding economic engagement, and pivotal diplomatic milestones, culminating in the launch of CPEC in 2015. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, the relationship has evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership, reflecting Pakistan's foreign policy pivot towards China in response to regional security and economic imperatives. The findings suggest that this historical trajectory has not only strengthened mutual trust, but has also laid a resilient foundation for future cooperation amid increasingly complex geopolitical dynamics.

The political dimensions of the Pakistan-China partnership have undergone significant transformation, characterised by high-level visits and strategic dialogues that deepened bilateral cooperation. State visits by leaders from both nations have strengthened alliances and enhanced diplomatic engagement, fostering the convergence of shared political objectives. This alignment is reflected in joint military exercises and defence agreements, which position Pakistan as a central actor in China's regional strategy. Moreover, the convergence of political interests has encouraged both countries to collaborate within multilateral forums, thereby amplifying their collective influence on regional and global platforms. The findings indicate that this political collaboration not only reinforces bilateral ties, but also plays a critical role in shaping the geopolitical dynamics of South Asia, particularly amid regional rivalries and strategic competition involving the United States.

The socio-economic dimensions of the Pakistan-China partnership have undergone substantial transformation through enhanced trade, investment, and cultural exchanges. CPEC

represents a pivotal initiative involving approximately \$62 billion investments, extended over time, and aimed at upgrading Pakistan's infrastructure along with energy sectors. This project not only addresses Pakistan's critical economic needs, but also strengthens socio-cultural ties through academic collaborations and people-to-people exchanges. However, challenges such as public discontent over perceived disparities in the distribution of CPEC, benefits and environmental concerns must be addressed to ensure long-term sustainability. The findings emphasise that while CPEC illustrates the convergence of economic imperatives and strategic goals, the success of the partnership depends on both nations' ability to manage security challenges and implement inclusive policies that foster equitable development.

The geo-strategic dimensions of the Pakistan-China partnership are shaped by regional dynamics and military cooperation, underscoring the alliance's significance within South Asia's geopolitical landscape. Pakistan's strategic location as a gateway to South and Central Asia makes it an indispensable partner in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), enhancing regional connectivity. CPEC serves as a vital initiative, enabling China to secure its trade routes and strengthen maritime security. This partnership functions as a counterbalance to India's expanding regional influence and the strategic complexities posed by US foreign policy. Despite internal security challenges, particularly in Balochistan, and external pressures from rival powers, the findings indicate that the durability of the Pakistan-China alliance lies in their shared strategic objectives and mutual economic interests. This evolving relationship is well-positioned to shape the region's geopolitical trajectory, contributing to a new global order defined by multipolarity and complex interdependencies.

6.2 Conclusion

The findings of this thesis offer a comprehensive analysis of Pakistan's foreign policy towards China during Xi Jinping's administration, highlighting the integration of political, socio-economic, and geo-strategic dimensions. The historical background of Sino-Pakistan relations provides a robust foundation for understanding this enduring partnership, which has been characterised by mutual trust and strategic alignment since 1951. Over time, Pakistan's foreign policy has increasingly pivoted towards China, driven by converging political objectives and regional security imperatives, particularly in response to India's growing influence. Socio-economic collaboration, particularly through initiatives like CPEC, underscores the economic importance of the relationship, delivering critical infrastructure and investment that significantly influence Pakistan's development trajectory. Furthermore, the geo-strategic aspects of the partnership promote regional connectivity and enhance both nations' standing in a multipolar global order, underscoring the pivotal role of Sino-Pakistan cooperation in shaping the direction of Pakistan's foreign policy.

During Xi Jinping's tenure, notable progress has been made in Pakistan-China relations, driven by enhanced political cooperation and substantial economic investment. CPEC has emerged as a landmark initiative, reflecting the depth of economic integration and strategic collaboration that characterise the bilateral relationship. High-level diplomatic visits have strengthened political ties, while joint military exercises exemplify defence cooperation aimed at bolstering regional security. However, these advancements are not without their challenges. Internal security concerns, particularly in Balochistan, alongside persistent regional rivalries, pose significant obstacles to the sustainability of the partnership. Furthermore, public perceptions surrounding the socio-economic impacts of CPEC have raised important concerns about equitable development and the inclusion of local communities. The findings suggest that, although the partnership has achieved considerable milestones, addressing these challenges

will be essential for ensuring the long-term effectiveness of Pakistan's foreign policy towards China.

The implications of the findings for future Pakistan-China relations are profound, as the evolving geopolitical landscape continues to shape the trajectory of their partnership. The alignment of strategic interests under Xi Jinping reflects a sustained commitment to enhancing cooperation, particularly in the face of external pressures from regional rivals and the United States. As both countries confront shared challenges, such as security threats and economic volatility, there exists significant potential for deeper integration across sectors, including trade, technology, and military collaboration. In addition, emerging global trends, such as the rise of multipolarity and growing economic interdependencies, offer both nations the opportunity to redefine their roles within the regional and international order. As a whole, while the Pakistan-China partnership is likely to remain a cornerstone of regional stability and development, proactive and adaptive strategies will be essential to overcome future challenges and fully realise the potential of this strategic alliance.

6.3 Recommendations

1. **Strengthening Political Collaboration:** To advance political synergy between Pakistan and China, it is imperative to establish robust institutional mechanisms that support regular high-level dialogues. These engagements should move beyond ceremonial formalities, focusing instead on actionable outcomes that directly address pressing issues such as regional security dynamics, counterterrorism strategies, and frameworks for economic cooperation. Integrating a diverse array of regional and provincial stakeholders including think tanks, civil society organisations, and business leaders into diplomatic dialogues would enable both nations to better align their foreign policy objectives. This comprehensive approach not only enhances the effectiveness of

political engagement but also deepens mutual understanding of each other's geopolitical concerns, thereby reinforcing the foundations of their strategic partnership.

2. **Expanding Socio-Economic Cooperation:** To unlock the full potential of socio-economic collaboration, Pakistan and China must diversify their trade and investment strategies beyond traditional sectors. Actively promoting industries such as technology, agriculture, and textiles would help both countries establish a more resilient economic relationship, less susceptible to external shocks. In addition, fostering people-to-people exchanges through educational and cultural programmes is vital for deepening mutual understanding and trust. Emphasising human capital development ensures that the partnership extends beyond intergovernmental agreements, embedding itself in the social fabric of both societies and supporting a more sustainable and enduring alliance.
3. **Enhancing Geo-Strategic Cooperation:** The geo-strategic dimension of the Pakistan-China partnership can be further strengthened through targeted military and security collaboration, particularly in areas such as counter-terrorism and maritime security. Prioritising joint military exercises, intelligence-sharing frameworks, and cooperative infrastructure projects will help establish a comprehensive security architecture capable of addressing both conventional and emerging threats. Given the growing maritime challenges in the Indian Ocean, a unified strategy centred on naval capabilities and secure trade routes is imperative. This proactive approach will not only safeguard the economic interests of both countries but also reinforce Pakistan's pivotal role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), thereby contributing to a shift in the regional balance of power.
4. **Mitigating Economic Vulnerabilities:** To counter potential economic dependencies and strategic vulnerabilities, Pakistan must adopt a diversified approach to its foreign relations. While maintaining a vital partnership with China, constructive engagement

with other major powers such as the United States and the European Union will enhance Pakistan's geopolitical resilience. Participating in dialogues that address mutual interests and concerns allows Pakistan to manage external pressures effectively while safeguarding its sovereignty. This balanced diplomatic strategy not only strengthens Pakistan's negotiating position but also promotes a stable regional environment conducive to sustained economic growth.

5. **Implementing Transparent Governance Practices:** The success of initiatives such as CPEC hinges significantly on the establishment of transparent governance structures. Both nations should collaborate to develop frameworks that prioritise accountability, including anti-corruption measures and rigorous project oversight protocols. By promoting transparency, Pakistan can reduce public concerns about foreign investment and build greater trust among its citizens. This commitment to good governance will enhance the effectiveness of bilateral projects and contribute to the long-term viability of the partnership, ensuring that economic benefits are equitably distributed.
6. **Promoting Sustainable Development Objectives:** Finally, the partnership must broaden its focus to include sustainable development initiatives that address environmental challenges and promote social equity. Collaboration on projects utilising green technologies and sustainable practices enables Pakistan and China to pursue economic growth without compromising ecological integrity. Involving local communities in these initiatives fosters social cohesion and shared ownership, positioning their partnership as a model of responsible development within the region.

REFERENCES

Official Government & Institutional Sources

CPEC Secretariat. *CPEC Fact Book 2019*. Islamabad: Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform, 2020.

CPEC Secretariat. *CPEC Quarterly Magazine*. Volume 3. Islamabad: Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform, 2019.

Books

Bencivelli, Lorenzo, and Flavia Tonelli. *China's International Projection in the Xi Jinping Era: An Economic Perspective*. Switzerland: Springer, 2020.

Bhola, P. L. *Pakistan-China Relations: Search for Politico-Strategic Relationship*. Jaipur: R.B.S.A. Publishers, 1986.

Brown, Kerry. *CEO, China: The Rise of Xi Jinping*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2016.

Chan, Alfred L. *Xi Jinping: Political Career, Governance, and Leadership, 1953-2018*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Fair, C. Christine. *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Garver, John W. *China and Pakistan: A Strategic Partnership*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2016.

Hilali, A. Z. *China-Pakistan Relations: Historical, Cultural, and Strategic Perspective*. Oxford: University Press, 2005.

- Jacob, Jabin T., and Hoang *The Anh*, eds. *China's Search for 'National Rejuvenation': Domestic and Foreign Policies under Xi Jinping*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- Martinson, Ryan D. *China's Global Maritime Grand Strategy: Present and Future*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2020.
- Pant, Harsh V. *The US-India Nuclear Pact: Policy, Process, and Great Power Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Rolland, Nadège. *China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative*. Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017.
- Sayed, Senator Mushahid Hussain. *Pakistan-China Relations in the Changing Regional and Global Scenario*. Islamabad: Pakistan-China Institute, 2021.
- Shao, Binhong, ed. *China in the World: A Survey of Chinese Perspectives on International Politics and Economics*. Volume 3. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Small, Andrew. *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics*. London: Hurst and Company, 2015.
- Wezeman, Pieter D., et al. *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2017*. Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2018. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/fssipri_at2017_0.pdf (accessed August 3, 2025).
- Wolf, Siegfried O. *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative: Concept, Context and Assessment*. Cham: Springer, 2019.
- Zhou, Xinmin. *Xi Jinping's Governance and the Future of China*. New York: Skyhorse, 2017.

Journal Articles

Abbasi, Rizwana. "Global Power Shift and Foreign Policy Choices for Pakistan." *Strategic Studies* 43, Number 1 (2023): 1-21.

Ahmed, Zaheer, Takaaki Nihei, and Najaf Ali. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): A Long-Term Sustainable Development Project, Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism Sector in Pakistan." *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 6, Number 1 (2025): 419-430.

Ali, Ghulam. "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Tapping Potential to Achieve the 2030 Agenda in Pakistan." *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 4, Number 2 (2018): 301-325.

Aslam, Muhammad, Uzma Naz, Zakir Hussain, and Muhammad Irfan Ahamad. "Pakistan-China Relations and Its Implication for India (2008-2018)." *Journal of South Asian Studies* 10, Number 2 (2022): 225-253.

Azeemi, Haris Raqeeb. "55 Years of Pakistan-China Relationship." *Pakistan Horizon* 60, Number 2 (2007): 109-124.

Bashir, Sadaf, and Sumara Gul. "Countering Terrorism and Reducing Strategic Uncertainty: Analysing 'Shaping' Multinational Military Exercises." *Margalla Papers* 25, Number 2 (2021): 71-83.

Bashir, Sadaf, Sumara Gul, and Muhammad Farrukh. "Maritime Security and the China-Pakistan Strategic Partnership: The Emerging Role of Task Force-88." *Institute of Regional Studies (Islamabad)*, Focus Report Number 45 (2023): 22-28.

Bukhari, Syed Waqas Haider, Musarrat Jabeen, and Qaim Raza Jaffry. "Energy Dynamics of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)." *Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad* 36, Number 3 (2018): 99-122.

- Butt, Sadaf, Muhammad Rizwan, and Muhammad Naveed Akhtar. "A Study of Pakistan-China Collaboration for the Elevation of Higher Education." *International Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, Number 2 (2023): 1-15.
- Chang, Yen-Chiang, and Mehran Idris Khan. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Maritime Security Collaboration: A Growing Bilateral Interest." *Maritime Business Review* 4, Number 2 (2019): 217-235.
- Chang, Yen Chiang, M. Jahanzeb Butt, and Khadija Zulfiqar. "A Comparative Analysis of the Environmental Policies in China and Pakistan: Developing a Legal Regime for Sustainable China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)." *IPRI Journal* 21, Number 1 (2021): 82-122.
- Faisal, Amina. "Pakistan-China Relations: Beyond CPEC." *Journal of South Asian Studies* 34, Number 1 (2019): 40-44.
- Faisal, Muhammad. "Pakistan-China Military Cooperation: Impact on Strategic Stability in South Asia." *Strategic Studies* 39, Number 2 (2019): 73-89.
- Fisher, Charles A. "Containing China? II. Concepts and Applications of Containment." *Geographical Journal* 137, Number 3 (1971): 281-310.
- Greitens, Sheena Chestnut, Myunghee Lee, and Emir Yazici. "Counterterrorism and Preventive Repression: China's Changing Strategy in Xinjiang." *International Security* 44, Number 3 (2019): 9-47.
- Hali, S. M., Nasir H. Mirza, and Hanif Ur Rehman. "One Belt and One Road: CPEC and the Geo-Politics of South Asia." *Journal of Political Studies* 23, Number 1 (2016): 113-125.
- Hameed, Maham. "The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor." *Berkeley Political Review* 7, Number 1 (2020): 1-10.

- Hameed, Maham. "The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor." *Journal of Contemporary Studies* 6, Number 2 (2017): 1-10.
- Hameed, Maham. "The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor." *Palgrave Communications* 4, Number 1 (2018): 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0115-7> (accessed June 4, 2023).
- Hameed, Maham. "The Politics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor." *Strategic Studies* 39, Number 2 (2019): 2-6.
- Hashmi, Muhammad Jawad, Sobia Jamil, and Ashfaq Ahmed. "Pakistan-China Military and Security Ties: A Qualitative Analysis." *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 3, Number 2 (2019): 284.
- Hussain, Mehmood, Ahmed Bux Jamali, Rana Danish Nisar, and Abdulfattah Omar. "The China-Iran Strategic Deal and CPEC: Navigating the Influence of Pragmatic Balancing in China's Relations with Iran and Pakistan." *Politics & Policy* 52, Number 1 (2024): 227-244.
- Hussain, Syed Rifaat. "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Regional Geopolitics." *Strategic Studies* 39, Number 2 (2019): 75-95.
- Ibrar, Muhammad, Jianining Mi, and M. Rafiq. "China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Socio-Cultural Cooperation and Its Impact on Pakistan." In *Proceedings of the 5th EEM International Conference on Education Science and Social Science (EEM-ESSS 2016)*, 179-183. Sydney, Australia, 2016.
- Jalil, Ghazala Yasmin. "Nuclear Arms Race in South Asia." *Strategic Studies* 37, Number 1 (2017): 18-41.
- Javaid, Umbreen, and Asifa Jahangir. "Pakistan-China Strategic Relationship: A Glorious Journey of 55 Years." *Journal of Research and Policy Studies* 52, Number 1 (January-June 2015): 160-171.

- Javaid, Umbreen, and Asifa Jahangir. "Pakistan-China Strategic Relationship: A Glorious Journey of 55 Years." *South Asian Studies* 30, Number 2 (July-December 2015): 45-60.
- Kamran, Taj, and Hussan Ara Magsi. "China-Pakistan Educational and Cultural Cooperation Under BRI." *Pacific International Journal* 6, Number S1 (2022): 40-50.
- Kataria, Jafar Riaz, and Anum Naveed. "Pakistan-China Social and Economic Relations." *South Asian Studies* 29, Number 2 (2014): 395-410.
- Khalid, Iram, and Muhammad Tahir Rashid. "Pakistan's Strategic Potential and Diplomatic Relations with China under Xi Jinping." *Orient Research Journal of Social Sciences* 6, Number 1 (June 2021): 179-186.
- Khalid, Masood. "Pakistan-China Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Environment." *Institute of South Asian Studies Number 30* (2021): 1-9. <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/pakistan-china-relations-in-a-changing-geopolitical-environment/> (accessed June 20, 2023).
- Khalid, Muhammad, and Ahsan Rashid. "Pakistan's Strategic Potential in South Asia." *Strategic Studies* 35, Number 4 (2015): 179-186.
- Khalid, Masood, and Muhammad Rashid. "Pakistan's Strategic Potential in the Context of Regional Geopolitics." *Strategic Studies* 39, Number 2 (2021): 179-186.
- Khalid, Masood, and Muhammad Rashid. "Pakistan's Strategic Potential in the Context of Regional Geopolitics." *Strategic Studies* 41, Number 2 (2021): 179-186.
- Khalid, Mahmood. "Pakistan-China Relations: An Enduring Strategic Partnership." *Strategic Studies* 38, Number 2 (2018): 1-9.
- Khalid, Mahmood, and Rizwana Rashid. "Pakistan's Strategic Potential: The Role of CPEC in Enhancing Pakistan's Geopolitical Standing." *Strategic Studies* 39, Number 2 (2019): 182-185.

- Khalid, Masood, and Muhammad Rashid. "Pakistan's Strategic Potential in the Regional Context." *Strategic Studies* 38, Number 3 (2018): 179-186.
- Khan, Aarish U. "Pak-China Economic Corridor: The Hopes and Reality." *Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad* 33, Number 1 (2015): 43-60.
- Khan, Zulfqar. "Escalating Crises Between India-Pakistan And Deterrence Stability: A Perspective." *Strategic Thought* 2 (2020): 114-128.
- Khattak, Iftikhar, and Iftikhar Ullah. "Impact of US-China Rivalry on India, Pakistan, and Regional Stability." *Asian Security* 19, Number 3 (2024): 210-223.
- Liaqat, Bilal Bin, Ghulam Mustafa, and Imran Wakil. "Sino-Pakistani Relations and its Alliance Against Traditional Security Threats in the South Asian Security Environment." *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 5, Number 2 (2022): 372-390.
- Mahmood, Taimur, and Sohail Ahmad. "CPEC Energy Projects: A Catalyst to Overcome Energy Crisis in Pakistan." *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 4, Number 2 (2021): 34-45.
- Makhdoom, Ahmad Waqas, Abdul Basit Khan, and Mazhar Abbas Khan. "A Study of Pakistan-China Defense Relations (2000-2012)." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, Number 22 (2014): 184-192.
- Malik, Hasan Yaser. "Strategic Importance of Gwadar Port." *Journal of Political Studies* 19, Number 2 (2012): 63-79.
- Maqsood, Asia. "China-Pakistan Strategic Partnership and India's Regional Ambitions in South Asia." *Strategic Studies* 41, Number 3 (2021): 48-65.
- Moradifar, Saeedeh, and Enayatollah Yazdani. "The Explanation of Effect and Role of BRICS on New World Order." *Strategic Studies of Public Policy* 7, Number 23 (2017): 43-60.

- Muhammad, Faqeer, Saranjam Baig, Khalid Mehmood Alam, and Attaullah Shah, eds. *Silk Route Revisited: Essays and Perspectives on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Beyond*. Gilgit-Baltistan: China Study Centre, Karakoram International University, 2023.
- Ovais, Muhammad, et al. "Traditional Chinese Medicine Going Global: Opportunities for Belt and Road Countries: TCM Importance in the Context of Belt Road Initiative." *Proceedings of the Pakistan Academy of Sciences: B. Life and Environmental Sciences* 56, Number 3 (2019): 17-26.
- Qadri, Mohammad Ahmed, and Suwaibah Qadri. "China-Pakistan Relations: With Reference to the Political Economy." *International Journal of Humanities, Arts, Medicine and Sciences* 4, Number 2 (February 2016): 187-194.
- Rafiq, Arif. "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Barriers and Impact." *United States Institute of Peace and Special Report Number 407* (October 2016): 1-20.
- Rahman, Fazal-ur-. "Pakistan's Evolving Relations with China, Russia, and Central Asia." *Journal of Social Sciences* 2, Number 2 (2012): 212-228.
- Raza Ullah, Syed, Abdul Rauf, and Muhammad Ayaz. "CPEC in Balochistan: Prospects and Problems." *Global Social Sciences Review* 4, Number 1 (2019): 27-37.
- Saez, Thomas. "SAARC and CPEC: Overlapping Regional Connectivity." *Asian Affairs* 52, Number 1 (2021): 67-82.
- Safdar, Aiysha. "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Maritime Geography and Regional Implications." *Strategic Studies* 35, Number 3 (2015): 17-20.
- Saud, Adam, and Kinza Arif. "South Asian Geo-Politics from the Prism of Pak-China Relations." *Journal of Peace, Development and Communication* 1, Number 2 (2017): 1-10.

- Sehrawat, Anjali. "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance and India-China Relations in Contemporary Geopolitics." *International Journal of Advance Study and Research Work* 6, Number 4 (2023): 42-49.
- Sehrawat, Surinder. "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance." *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 25, Number 1/2 (2012): 42-49.
- Sehrawat, Vikas. "Exploring the China-Pakistan Alliance: CPEC and Beyond." *South Asian Studies* 34, Number 2 (2019): 42-49.
- Shah, Mehtab Ali. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Its Socio-Cultural Impacts on the Local People of Pakistan." *Journal of Political Studies* 26, Number 2 (2019): 223-235.
- Shahbaz, Muhammad, Ayesha Siddiqui, and Bilal Ahmed. "The Role of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Strengthening Education and Cultural Exchange." *Global Social Sciences Review* 5, Number 4 (2020): 223-230.
- Shabbir, Nida, Imran Wakil, and Israr Rasool. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Change in the Geo-Strategic Outlook of Pak-China Relations." *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 5, Number 2 (2021): 507-512.
- Sial, Safdar. "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: An Assessment of Potential Threats and Constraints." *Conflict and Peace Studies* 6, Number 2 (2014): 15-17.
- Subrahmanyam, K. "The Interests of External Powers in Pakistan." *International Journal of Politics* 4, Number 3 (1974): 71-88.
- Tasleem, Sadia. "Internal Drivers-The Nexus between Domestic Politics and Bilateral Relations: Exploring India-Pakistan, Pakistan-China, and China-India Dynamics." *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 5, Number 2 (2022): 315-335.
- Tiang Boon, Hoo, and Glenn KH Ong. "Military Dominance in Pakistan and China-Pakistan Relations." *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 75, Number 1 (2021): 80-102.

Weidong, Sun. "Pakistan-China Relations: CPEC and Beyond." *Policy Perspectives* 14, Number 2 (2017): 1-9.

Zeb, Rizwan. "Pakistan-China Relations: Where They Go from Here?" *Policy Perspectives* 3, Number 2 (2006): 45-58.

Zeb, Rizwan. "Pakistan-China Relations: Where They Go from Here?" *Revista UNISCI* Number 29 (2012): 45-58.

Zhang, Weidong. "Pakistan-China Relations: A Strategic Partnership." *Contemporary International Relations* 27, Number 3 (2017): 2-7.

Zulfaqar, Maria, et al. "The Mediating Roles of Economic, Socio-Cultural, and Environmental Factors to Predict Tourism Market Development by Means of Regenerative Travel: An Infrastructural Perspective of CPEC." *Sustainability* 15, Number 6 (2023): e5025-1-e5025-15.

Unpublished Theses or Dissertations

Haidar, Muhammad Adnan, and Fang Qi. "China-Pakistan Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation under Belt & Road Initiative." *Siazga Research Journal* 2, Number 3 (July 2023): 186-191. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375746515_China-Pakistan_Cultural_Exchanges_and_Cooperation_under_Belt_Road_Initiative (accessed August 4, 2023).

Websites (Non-Government)

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Education as a Tool of China-Pakistan Engagement." *The Local Roots of Chinese Engagement in Pakistan*. June 2021. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/06/01/education-as-tool-of-china-pakistan-engagement-pub-84624> (accessed August 4, 2023).

Government of the People's Republic of China, "Statement of 7 September 1965 Condemning India's Aggression," quoted in "China 'Intervention' During the 1965 Conflict," *Indian Defence Review*, accessed June 24, 2023, <https://indiandefencereview.com/china-intervention-during-the-1965-conflict/>.

Pantucci, Raffaello, and Abdullah Dayo. *Cultural Crossings: China's Soft Power in Pakistan*. Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). December 2022. <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/cultural-crossings-chinas-soft-power-pakistan> (accessed August 4, 2023).

Riedel, Bruce, and Pavneet Singh. "U.S.-China Relations: Seeking Strategic Convergence in Pakistan." *Brookings Policy Paper Number 18* (January 2010): 1-17. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/u-s-china-relations-seeking-strategic-convergence-in-pakistan/> (accessed June 18, 2024).

Siddiqui, Naveed. "'Punish the Perpetrators': China Presses Pakistan for Tighter Security." *Dawn*. August 21, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1641817> (accessed July 2, 2023).

Wang, Yi. "China-Pakistan Energy Cooperation Yields New Prospects for Local Economy." *Global Times*. n.d. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202407/1316498.shtml> (accessed April 22, 2024).

Wilson Center Digital Archive. "Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai's Conversation with Pakistan President Ayub Khan." April 2, 1965. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/record-conversation-between-premier-zhou-enlai-and-president-pakistan-ayub-khan> (accessed June 26, 2023).

Official Websites

CPEC Secretariat. "Energy Projects Under CPEC." *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor*. n.d. <https://cpec.gov.pk/energy> (accessed March 16, 2024).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan. "Pakistan-China Relations." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. January 10, 2024. <https://mofa.gov.pk/china> (accessed August 5, 2024).