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**Abstract**

*The two countries being strategic partners, both Pakistan and China are confronted with a number of security threats and challenges in their respective regions. Internal security threats are a burning issue for Pakistan they include; terrorism, insurgency, sectarian violence, and separatist movements. These threats are often associated with various outside agents, especially countries, and neighbors in this case India and Afghanistan. Globally, China is now perceived as an emergent power and continues to be checked, especially, by powers such as America. In its own region, China too is not immune to security threats with the territorial disputes regarding the South China Sea or the border tensions with India. It is therefore expected that Pakistan like any ally to China will actively engage in coming up with ways and means of combating the above security threats and challenges.*

**Keywords:** CPEC, China, Pakistan, Challenges, Extremism, Terrorism

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### Title

## China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Security Threats and Challenges for Pakistan and China

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### Abstract

The two countries being strategic partners, both Pakistan and China are confronted with a number of security threats and challenges in their respective regions. Internal security threats are a burning issue for Pakistan they include; terrorism, insurgency, sectarian violence, and separatist movements. These threats are often associated with various outside agents, especially countries, and neighbors in this case India and Afghanistan. Globally, China is now perceived as an emergent power and continues to be checked, especially, by powers such as America. In its own region, China too is not immune to security threats with the territorial disputes regarding the South China Sea or the border tensions with India. It is therefore expected that Pakistan like any ally to China will actively engage in coming up with ways and means of combating the above security threats and challenges.

**Keywords:** [CPEC](#), [China](#), [Pakistan](#), [Challenges](#), [Extremism](#), [Terrorism](#)

### Introduction

Pakistan came into being on 14th August 1947 at the time of the partition of India and the formation of two different countries India and Pakistan. The country is surrounded by countries like Iran, China, Afghanistan and India. It was established

Islamabad is in a very strategic geographical position as a developing nation and many extra and endogenous factors not only hinder the nation's integration but also ail the economic structure (Siddiqui, 2021).



Both the Chinese and Pakistanis living along the Himalayas have always had mutual respect and loyalty for each other. Since 1947 Pakistan and China have maintained a policy of mutual respect, peaceful co-existence, mutual benefit, and shared sorrows and joys, mutually supporting each other in distressed situations (Ghulam, 2017).

Premier Li Keqiang envisioned CPEC in May 2013 when he visited Pakistan, officially it was outlined in April 2015 when Chinese President Xi visited the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The objective is to economically connect Pakistan to the Middle East, Central Asia, Indonesia, and Africa (Mengsheng, 2015). Muhammad Nawaz Sharif met Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2014 to sign an agreement of 19 billion dollars agreements covering the energy and infrastructure projects along the corridor. This meeting between Xi and Nawaz took place in April 2015, when the two leaders signed a total of \$46 billion worth of deal which included 51 agreements between China and Pakistan (Abid Massarrat, Ashfaq Ayesha, 2015).

## Methodology

To study the internal security threats posed by the project “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)”, the following methodology can be adopted:

**Literature review:** An analytical study of the secondary data available on CPEC and its effect on the internal security situation of Pakistan will be done. This will be inclusive of the following; scholarly articles, reports, government documents, and newspapers among other sources.

**Interviews:** A number of interviews will be held with different experts as well as participants in security, economics, and political spheres with the purpose of receiving their opinions on the materials of the investigation. Such professionals may comprise policymakers, security operatives, economists, and scholars among others.

**Case studies:** The research study can therefore adopt a case analysis of the concrete internal security threats that CPEC creates in several geographical areas within Pakistan. This will include reviewing the effects of CPEC on the people, reactions from stakeholders other than the government, and actions being implemented by the government to ensure security threats.

**Data analysis:** Security statistics data on the attack rates in the regions of CPEC-impacted provinces including Balochistan and Gilgit Baltistan can be made using statistical tools. To assess shifts in the security situation this data can be juxtaposed with the pre-CPEC period.

All in all, such a mixed-methods framework will allow for a more comprehensive identification of internal security threats related to CPEC for Pakistan.

## Research Questions

- What are the important objectives of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)?
- What is the situation of Internal security threats to CPEC in Pakistan?
- What strategies have been adopted by the non-state actors such as the extreme organizations, separatists, and other related groups in regard to the CPEC?
- In what way has the Pakistani government been trying to counter the internal security threats that CPEC would bring in the future?

## Theoretical Framework

International security theory is a branch of political science that focuses on understanding the various theories and paradigms of attaining security in the international system. It includes a number of theoretical frameworks, ideas, and tools to analyze the sources of conflict, the types of threats to security, and the ways to avoid or address them.

The following are some of the theoretical approaches that have been used in the analysis of international security; realism, liberalism, constructivism, critical theory, and post-structuralism. Realism zeroes in on the concept of power, and the realist view of the world as a system of states that are in constant rivalry for power and existence, while liberalism concentrates on cooperation as a way of developing better and more friendly relations among states. Constructivism focuses on understanding the role of ideas and norms in the workings of world politics, whereas critical theory focuses on power and social relations in the construction of security threats. Post-structuralism can be said to disrupt the conventional epistemological assumptions that inform the theory of international security. It is necessary to study International security theory as

it gives policymakers and academicians tools to understand the relationships between conflict and cooperation in the international systems. This paper has discussed the various approaches to the understanding of international security in order to help researchers and policymakers come up with better ways of responding to the causes and effects of conflict. According to the international security theory, these challenges can be discussed in different ways. By using realist theory one could argue that these challenges are a result of the interstate competition for power and influence. Some of the conflicts such as those between Pakistan and India are fueled by a desire to control territory. China and the United States, for instance, are in a race for dominance in the international system. According to the Constructivist theory, security threats to Pakistan and China are socially constructed and have a relation to identity. The growing nationalism in India has created conflict with Pakistan while the ethnic and language differences between the Uighur people of Xinjiang and the Han Chinese have led to the conflict in this region, (Bellany, [1981](#)). The security threats and challenges faced by Pakistan and China are complex and multifaceted and require a nuanced understanding of international security theory to effectively address them.

### **Security Threats and Challenges**

The most important of the security challenges is the peaceful completion of CPEC resting on Pakistan and China. The country that is Pakistan has been dealing with the problem of terrorism and extremism since the year 1990. It can be mentioned some internal factors that should be considered from the point of view of the internal security of Pakistan.

The CPEC has the potential to give a strong economic boost to Pakistan, however, there are some internal security challenges that Pakistan has to deal with. Let's have a look at the main security challenges to CPEC:

**Balochistan Insurgency:** The largest province in Pakistan is Baluchistan. The location of Gwadar Port is one of the terminal points of CPEC. The province has been in the grip of an insurgency mounted by Baloch separatists who allege that the central government has discriminated against them and their region and plundered its resources. The

Baloch militants have however launched several attacks on the CPEC projects, and personnel including Chinese workers and engineers.

**Terrorism:** Pakistan has been a victim of terrorism for the past many years and there are a number of terrorist outfits actively present in the country. Some of these groups for instance the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Islamic State (IS) have in the past attacked Chinese nationals and facilities in Pakistan. The Pakistani government has acted to enhance the security of the CPEC projects, for instance, by assigning particular security forces to guard Chinese personnel.

**Political Instability:** Pakistan has been a politically unstable country with frequent changes of government and a poor civil-military balance. Such a situation may lead to the un Certain environment for foreign investors, including China, and may result in delays and disruptions of CPEC projects.

**Socio-Economic Disparities:** CPEC will pave the way for positive economic development in Pakistan but at the same time can lead to the worsening of social inequalities between the provinces of Pakistan. The 'project-based' approach of the government towards the development of infrastructure in the western and northern regions of Pakistan will only serve to exacerbate the existing situation in Sindh and Balochistan (Ismail et.al, [2023](#)).

In order to meet these security threats, Pakistan must therefore adopt an integrated strategy that has to do with enhancing governance and security, attending to the demands of the disenfranchised ethnic groups, and fostering inclusive economic growth (Javed, 2021). To this end, the government should focus on securing the Chinese people and their assets and precisely cooperate with the Chinese authorities but also seek dialogue with Baloch insurgents as well as other minority groups in the country. At the same time, Pakistan has to eliminate the sources of terrorism and political crisis, such as poverty, corruption, and institutional deficiencies. In conclusion, it can be said that the future of CPEC is linked with these security threats that Pakistan needs to manage and provide a secure environment for foreign investors (Saleem, [2019](#)).

The threats are mainly created by TTP, especially in the former FATA, the Swat district of

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The increasing Religious Extremism and Terrorism is a menace to the CPEC. The Religious and Ethnic Strife that powers up Sectarian Conflict among major sects has immensely affected the peace in Pakistan. Afghanistan's Pashtuns have backed the insurgent's cause which cannot be separated from the insurgency linked to the Taliban's connection with Pashtuns in Waziristan. (Ibrar et al., 2017).

Baluch has always felt neglected and deprived of social, political, and economic justice even though Baluchistan is rich in natural resources. They do not have access to clean water and other elementary health facilities; for instance, (Ahmad, 2017). People in Baluchistan are fearful and aggressive towards projects in Gawadar, because they don't receive royalties due to the Chinese government and non-indigenous people, extracting resources from Baluchistan. Gawadar is an important location and Kashgar is the second important part if the CPEC are vulnerable to such threats. The tense Uyghur situation can be cooled down with the five business zones in China that are to be instructed under CPEC. Similarly, in Baluchistan, numerous separatist factions oppose the initiative, with certain Balochi groups demanding their fair portion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Ishaq et.al, 2017). Only one economic zone is given to this underdeveloped province of Pakistan. The Pakistani government's primary concern lies in implementing security measures for the short term to ensure the safety of routes, staff, and other relevant aspects pertaining to the security project. Pakistan likewise places significant importance on the well-being and security of the Chinese labor force (Robina et.al, 2019). The Pakistani Army is strategically advancing towards the objective of establishing a military force consisting of 10,000 personnel to safeguard the Chinese projects operating under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Mengsheng, 2015).

Pakistan currently lacks a constitution or legal foundation to assert its official control over Gilgit-Baltistan until 2021. Consequently, this has generated significant discontent among nationalists and the inhabitants of GB. The absence of legal documentation for certain rights, as well as the presence of nationalist organizations, poses significant dangers to the national security of

Pakistan. India is susceptible to regional instability, secession, radicalism, and Shia-Sunni war (Ismail, 2021).

The situation in Pakistan has been exacerbated by sectarian, caste, and regional disputes, as well as the conflict between the privileged and the underprivileged. Nationalist and sub-nationalist organizations and parties oppose the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its trajectory. The pervasive instability in Baluchistan poses a significant security threat to the successful implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The region of Baluchistan is also volatile and has an insurgency issue which is a major threat to the CPEC. The socio-economic and security situation are unfavorable, water crisis is acute in Baluchistan where only 30% of the population has access to water for irrigational and domestic use, 70% of Baluchistan population is below the poverty line, literacy and health standards are also very low in Pakistan, militancy, terrorism, sectarian violence, Baloch separatist movements, Taliban, Indian interference in Baluchistan to create havoc in Pakistan are some of the issues that prevail (Siddiqui, 2021). The leaders of Pakhtun nationalism have lodged a complaint and said that the federal government has made alterations to the original route. The federal administration was also charged by Sindh nationalists, particularly the Sindh ethnic nationalists and Sindh Desh revolutionaries. The Pakistan military has established a specialized security unit called the Special Security Division (SSD) to safeguard the workforce involved in cheese production within the corridor. This force consists of six wings of paramilitary personnel and nine army battalions, which include the Frontier Corps (FC) and Rangers.

### **Internal Security Threats and Challenges**

The project has the potential to bring economic benefits to both countries, but it also faces several internal security threats and challenges for China.

### **Insurgency and Terrorism**

Some of the major risks that are posed to the CPEC are the insurgency and terrorism that is still on the rise in Balochistan which is the main route of the corridor. Baloch separatist groups who are seeking independence from Pakistan opposed the CPEC as

they consider it a tool by which the Pakistani government and China would use Baloch resources and territory without their approval. These groups have attacked Chinese workers and assets in the region, which has been ramped up in the last few years (Ismail, [2022](#)).

### **Ethnic and Religious Tensions**

There are other threats to the CPEC; one of them is the ethno-religious extremism in the region. The project is implemented in the regions where ethnic minorities such as the Baloch, Pashtuns, and Sindh have their own ethnic grievances. Pakistan also has a Shiite population and this Shiite has been a victim of the Sunni Takfiri groups (Iqbal et.al, [2021](#)). The Chinese influence in the area could also be feeding these conflicts and raising the stakes of the violence.

### **Cybersecurity**

The expansion of the use of digital technologies has however presented a big question as to the security of the CPEC. Terrorism, and cyber threats on power plants, oil refineries, and transport systems may lead to grave disturbance to the project. China's investment in the digital infrastructure of Pakistan is also a threat to data privacy and Chinese spying on Pakistani data.

### **Environmental Challenges**

Dam constructions and, the creation of roads and pipelines could result in the forced eviction of people and loss of their homes and in turn, the loss of wildlife habitats and environmental changes. This could therefore lead to more tension and more conflict in the region. Internal security threats and challenges to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project include the following for China. Some of the risks that may affect the success of the project include; insurgency and terrorism, ethnic and religious conflicts, cyber security threats, and environmental threats. China and Pakistan must therefore set out measures to overcome these challenges in order to foster the development of the area.

Gilgit Baltistan is in a unique position between India, China, and Pakistan. It achieved the status of an 'A' district on the 1st of November, 1947, and has its own culture and history different from the rest of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It will be

recalled that the inhabitants of Gilgit also wish to become the third party in the CPEC.

The Taliban stormed into Kabul on August 15, 2021, and established an Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, and Ashraf Ghani, the President of Afghanistan fled to Oman. Every American soldier in Afghanistan will be out of the country by the end of August (Ismail, [2023](#)). When the US departs, the Taliban rejoices its freedom. Afghanistan is in the process of change, which will have a good and bad impact on Pakistan. The following are the challenges that the Taliban may encounter, that is, reintegration, state-building particularly in maintaining peace and order in Afghanistan, trust building especially among the Afghan people, economic development, determining their position vis-à-vis neighboring countries, and combating narcotics and weapons.

### **Conclusion**

China's relationship with Pakistan has been longstanding and bilateral since 1949 and China has always been a good friend of Pakistan. Chinese media has described the two countries' relations as higher than the Himalayas. For Pakistan's developing economy the mega project of \$62 billion has been termed as a game changer. Political and economic integration is increasing and deepening; this is not a thin and fluid relationship. The area will come into light as far as peace, economics, and politics develop. These two states are the most important when it comes to the stability of the Corridor since the region has been a theatre of war since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

The geopolitical landscape in South Asia saw a subtle transformation following the September 11th attack, when the United States launched a military operation in Afghanistan and successfully toppled the Taliban regime. NATO is engaged in military operations across multiple regions in Afghanistan, while a significant population of three million Afghans has sought asylum in Pakistan. ISIS, Taliban, and Al Qaeda are among the most dangerous terrorist organizations globally, posing a significant threat to Pakistan. Pakistan faces several challenges, including mismanagement, corruption, political instability, deteriorating infrastructure, terrorism, and militancy, particularly in the province of Baluchistan. Pakistan, China, and the rest of the world have a vested interest in ensuring

peace and stability in Afghanistan. Terrorist groups and international intelligence services in Afghanistan prioritize their own interests rather than the stability of the country. The future of the project relies on the security and stability of Afghanistan. Therefore, the global community has endeavored to establish the necessity of restoring order following the Taliban's assumption of power.

In the twenty-first century, trade is the real strength of a country's economy. It is the desire of every country to forge relations with other countries with a view to increasing exports and imports. Following Afghanistan's gradual incorporation into the Central Asian economic space, the initiative will permit the access of Pakistani ports on the Persian Gulf to Afghanistan and other Central Asian states. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a large-scale infrastructure venture that holds the promise of catalyzing economic growth in Pakistan and generating employment. However, the project is not without certain risks and threats which are of a security nature. Both countries have to put in efforts in order to provide security to the project and look into the issues broached by the project such as political conflicts, environmental impact, and economic feasibility. If these challenges are met and solved then the CPEC can be a turning point for both countries.

Pakistan's security along the 300 km of the corridor, and the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean are some of the crucial concerns to the success of the corridor. Among the significant projects aimed at enhancing the economic ties and the development of a certain region, is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Nevertheless, based on the findings of the empirical study, the present work has also identified several key security challenges that can be a concern for China and Pakistan. Some of the risks include separatist movements, insurgent activity, and geopolitical rivalry along the CPEC route for instance in Pakistan. To meet these threats, it is imperative that the security forces of Pakistan and the foreign partners in the CPEC security structure work in a very close synergy. China has to face the challenges of the local political situation, keep up the infrastructure, and deal with the risks concerning the investments and personnel in the CPEC territory. In light of the long-term strategic interest of China in the region protection of CPEC investments is crucial. An evaluation of the various stakeholders' concerns, environmental conservation, and sound development is crucial due to the social-economic impact of CPEC projects. Maintaining steady growth and the prevention of any future disputes calls for the right balance between profits and social and environmental concerns.

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