

# EVOLVING DYNAMICS OF PAKISTAN–CHINA RELATIONS: IMPACTS ON REGIONAL POLITICS

MUHAMMAD JAVED

PHD SCHOLAR, DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, GOVERNMENT COLLEGE UNIVERSITY  
FAISALABAD PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

DR. GHULAM MUSTAFA

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, GOVERNMENT COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY FAISALABAD PUNJAB, PAKISTAN, EMAIL: [ghulammustafa@gcuf.edu.pk](mailto:ghulammustafa@gcuf.edu.pk)

## Abstract

This paper examines the changing political, economic, and strategic relations between Pakistan and China, and how it relates to the countries in the region, South Asia, and others. China-Pakistan relations has intensified in recent decades, especially with its activities such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a showpiece project by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China. This relationship has brought about more economic integration, military integration and diplomatic harmonies with China becoming the biggest trade partner and a major partner of Pakistan in the geo-political arena. But this has been changing with the increasing intensity of Pakistan-China relations, as it has alarmed other nations of the region, such as India, Afghanistan, and the United States. India considers the strategic character of such a relationship, especially when CPEC traverses the contentious lands such as Gilgit-Baltistan, to be a great challenge to its prevailing status in the region. Meanwhile, Afghanistan is apprehensive about the growing dependence of Pakistan on China, as they are afraid that the balance of power will be shifted in the region. Moreover, the U.S. and Western nations have raised their eyebrows regarding the kind of debt the Chinese investments to Pakistan pose, and the possibility of China increasing its grip in the region.

In this paper, the authors will discuss the main motivation of Pakistan-China relations, evaluate the responses of the region, and reflect on the further geopolitical implications of this alliance on South Asia and international politics.

**Keywords:** CPEC, BRI, Pakistan, China, Afghanistan

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Beginning with Xi Jinping's regime in 2012, the diplomatic ties between the two nations have advanced in economy, defence, diplomacy, and infrastructure construction. Under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Xi's plans have added new strategic value to China's involvement with Pakistan. Pakistan's dependence on China for funding, military alliances, trade, and diplomatic ties has grown. These changes do not happen in isolation from consequences. They profoundly impact the foreign relations of Pakistan's immediate neighbors: India, Afghanistan, Iran, the Central Asian Republics (CARs), and the countries bordering the Arabian Sea. This chapter reviews the literature (2009-2025, specifically post-2013 under Xi's rule) regarding Pakistan-China relations and their impact on these countries in the region regarding security, economics, diplomacy, and the emerging geo-strategic concerns.

The country's economy has shown tremendous progress, attributed to the CPEC, which has received foreign investments in excess of \$62 billion by 2025 in infrastructure, energy, and industrial zones, making it the most critical bilateral investment in Pakistan's history (Sharif, 2022). This was confirmed by the World Bank in the year 2024. From 2018 to 2023, Pakistan had an annual growth rate of 2-3%, notably lower than the 5-6% average growth rate regionally in South Asia during the same period (Bank, 2025). The financing from China is helping Pakistan stabilize its unequal economy. However, this has raised the important question of debt sustainability, since Pakistan's external debt reached \$131 billion in 2024, and about 20% owed to China (News, 2025). These numbers illustrate the true nature of dependence. China is Pakistan's most significant development and investment partner, however, in return for this financial support, Islamabad is forced to compromise a considerable degree of its policy autonomy in other specific development and investment partner, however, Islamabad is forced to compromise a significant degree of its policy autonomy in other specific policy areas at a regional and global level.

The expansion of security cooperation is directly applicable here. In relation to SIPRI's arms transfer database, between 2018 and 2022, China supplied 81% of Pakistan's major arms imports, thus making it the largest source of arms to Pakistan (China's military weapons, 2025). This includes the J-10 fighter jet, naval frigates, and missiles, which enhances Pakistan's ability to defend against India and increases the integration of the two militaries in training and logistics. This cooperation has expanded to counter- terrorism, as both countries have

begun joint exercises to counter militant activities along the western border, especially in Balochistan, which has seen increased attacks on Chinese workers since 2021 (Ahmad O., 2024). Such dynamics illustrate how Pakistan's security is becoming increasingly merged with China's external strategic interests, especially concerning the security of BRI projects. Distrust does not escape India either. New Delhi has maintained a constructive position against the CPEC because a portion of its track runs through Gilgit-Baltistan, a territory India claims to (Shah, Muzaffar, & Yaseen, 2020). India perceives the strengthening of the Pakistan-China defense and economic nexus as an intensification of India's strategic encirclement by Beijing. India's defense expenditure of \$86.1 billion in 2024 is 6 times Pakistan's \$13 billion defense budget (Xiao Liang, 2025). Such disparities guarantee Pakistan's continued reliance on Chinese military and diplomatic backing to offset India's dominance.

Afghanistan has emerged as another critical dimension. Pakistan's efforts to coordinate with China on economic engagements to stabilize the Afghan state post the Taliban's takeover in 2021. The discussions on extending CPEC into Afghanistan reflect Beijing's desire to connect Central Asia and South Asia, utilizing Pakistan as the corridor. This would not only bolster Pakistan's transit revenues, but also elevate its status as a regional connectivity hub. However, continual attacks by IS-K, Taliban, and the domestic security situation pose critical challenges. Furthermore, Iran and the littoral states of the Arabian Sea, too, pay a lot of attention to these dynamics. The potential rivalry between Gwadar and Chabahar Port and the latter's backing by India illustrates the contestation of different connectivity visions. Gwadar, which is managed with the assistance of the Chinese, provides access to the Arabian Sea, thus enabling China to avoid the Malacca Strait. In contrast, the Chabahar port served as India's access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, which counterbalanced CPEC. The Gulf states, notably the Saudi and Emirati, have also funded energy projects in Pakistan, which creates both synergy and rivalry with the projects financed by China.

The Central Asia Republics perceive Pakistan's integration with China as having the possible advantage of a new access route to the sea. With intra-regional trade between Central Asia and South Asia estimated at below five per cent of total exports in 2023 (World Bank 2024), the, by now, somewhat hypothetical extension of CPEC provides valuable opportunities. However, the ongoing political instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan calls into question the plausibility of such secure land-based corridors. To sum up, under Xi Jinping's leadership, relations between China and Pakistan have expanded beyond a bilateral relationship. Investments, defense, and diplomacy have been recombined to redefine a regional order. While this change creates new opportunities for growth and connectivity, it still poses many additional challenges, such as geopolitics, security, debt, and competition. This chapter shifts focus to South Asia, Central Asia, and the Indian ocean to explore the finer details of this matter.

## **2. India**

### **2.1 Strategic Balancing and Deterrence**

One of the central implications of Pakistan-China relations for India is strategic deterrence. China's increasing arms transfers and military cooperation with Pakistan (joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and defense production) reinforce Pakistan's deterrent capacity against India, thus raising the stakes in South Asia's strategic stability (Khan, 2024). China pays attention to its South Asian flank. This is why it seeks to ensure that Pakistan can buffer and confront India's influence in the region in certain situations (Khan M. S., 2024). Additionally, India's perspective on the CPEC as a potential sovereignty threat, primarily through contested territories such as Kashmir, shows how Pakistan-China relations contribute to India's strategic shifts on disputed borders. India's strategic interests, including investments on infrastructure and border infrastructure, have been influenced by the political economy collaboration resulting from CPEC (Ahmad, Gill, Hussian, & Ismail, PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: POLITICAL AND ECONOMY COOPERATION THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF CPEC, 2024).

### **2.2. Diplomacy, Alignments, and the U.S**

The closer alignment of Pakistan with China has impacted India's behavior, especially in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), BRICS, and within multiparty counterterrorism conversations. At the same time, to limit China's growing influence, India has been strengthening relations with the U. S. and the Quad (Japan and Australia) and other neighboring countries. In "Trilateral Dynamics in Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Balancing China and Hedging the US," it is argued that as Pakistan deepens relations with China, Islamabad, at the same time, tries to maintain certain relationships with the U. S. to manage the economic dependence and gain access to other technological and financial resources. This is a diplomatic setting that India is keenly interested in, particularly with the growing American activity in the Indo-Pacific and their use of India's alignment to counterbalance China (Ali, Arshad, & Rogers, 2024).

### **2.3 Economic Spillovers and Competition**

The CPEC and the investments made by the Chinese in Pakistan bring about new prospects and competitive pressures for India from an economic standpoint. While the infrastructure development, cross-border connectivity, and Gwadar Port (and the ports in general) can boost India's connectivity with Central Asia, the Pak-China relations might result in the loss of trade, investments, and transit previously made available by Indian trade corridors. An Indian former diplomat and international relations specialist, in his research "China's strategic interests in Pakistan; beyond CPEC," argues that India tends to think that Chinese investments in ports, especially Gwadar and other above-sea facilities, tend to enhance China's influence in Pakistan and assert competitive

presence in the boundary sea region and Indian sea region. China's development of Pakistan's agriculture, minerals, and connectivity projects reduces China's dependence on trade routes from Indian controlled routes over the Indian Ocean (Khan M. S., 2024).

#### **2.4 Civil Security Issues: Border, Terrorism, and Military Action**

India also needs to focus on national issues in border defense and cross-border militant activity. There might be issues with militant cross-border hideouts and the process of radicalization from the Indian side, as Pakistan starts with the counter terrorism cooperation with the Chinese due to the pressure from the Chinese to stabilize the region of Xinjiang. In addition, worrying the Indian side is the prospect of Chinese arms or military assistance encouraging Pakistan to adopt a more aggressive stance along the Line of Control (LoC) and in Kargil.

### **3. Afghanistan**

#### **3.1 The Security Vacuum, The Taliban, and Their China Engagement**

The US forces' withdrawal in 2021 created a security vacuum within Afghanistan, assuming the Taliban's position as rulers, albeit de facto. China is reluctant to recognize them officially, but has interacted with them in areas of infrastructure, trade, and connectivity. For Pakistan, the close association with China helps to relieve Islamabad of the sole burden of mediating with Kabul and the other regional powers. The Pakistan-China relations give Islamabad more room to maneuver diplomatically, for example, by gaining Chinese support in multilateral fora and strategically positioning itself in the Taliban negotiations (Ullah F. , 2024).

The sectoral investments that China is making with Afghanistan (reconstruction, infrastructure, and mining) might change regional security dynamics. Pakistan could extend the CPEC network to provide transit through Afghanistan to Central Asia. There are also worries that radical groups may take advantage of Afghan territory to attack CPEC targets and Chinese citizens in Pakistan. The security framework of South Asia illustrates how the Pakistan-China security partnership reinforces defensive cooperation to mitigate Afghanistan-based risks.

#### **3.2 Refugees, Border Control, and Militancy**

From the Pakistani side, the border with Afghanistan has always been a weak area in the country's security architecture. The presence of networks of militants, such as the ISIS Khorasan Province, the Taliban, and other fragments, adds to the vulnerability. The Chinese position on counterterrorism, particularly focused on guarantees against Exalted Yanxi (the possible movement of militants across Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan), has a direct influence on Pakistan's border and internal security. Moreover, there is a risk of spillover radicalization. Certain groups of militants opposed to China's policies in the region of Xinjiang might transit Afghanistan and have an operational base in the border areas of Pakistan. It, in turn, elevates the security dynamics in the region, especially for Iran and the Central Asian republics.

### **4. Iran.**

#### **4.1. Geo-strategic overlaps and maritime routes**

Next to China's interest in the Arabian Sea and the Gwadar port, Iran also borders Pakistan, and the more Pakistan aligns with China, the more it creates competition. Iran's interest in developing the Chabahar port in collaboration with India may partially overlap with China's ambitions. Chinese interests beyond CPEC, such as expanding shipping capabilities, securing vital sea corridors, and acquiring oil, rare minerals, and other minerals, may embrace Pakistan's shoreline, thereby altering the geopolitical landscape of the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. Scholars suggest that China's Pakistan Policy is no longer limited to transport and energy (Khan M. S., 2024). Chinese interests in the maritime domain are increasingly developing (e.g., route security, naval facilities acquisition, sea lines of communication defense for the CPEC). Pakistan Journal of International Affairs

#### **4.2. Shared Security Threats**

Iran, Pakistan, and China have common security threats: drug trafficking on the Iran-Pakistan border, cross-border terrorism, and refugee problems, as well as the periodic tensions related to the Balochistan insurgent groups that operate in Iran and Pakistan (the Balochistan case). Any cooperation on counterterrorism between Pakistan and China goes indirectly to help Iran, especially if Pakistan can lower the traffic of the militant corridor that extends to Iran, or otherwise, militant pressure may be shifted from one country to the other.

#### **4.3 Diplomatic Balancing and Economic Competition**

For geopolitical balancing, cultivating relationships with China, India, and other countries has become prominent for Iran. For instance, regionally, Chinese investments in Pakistan could lessen Pakistan's appetite for Iranian energy imports or even completely restructure regional trade patterns. On the other hand, China's desire to increase energy imports from Iran (as has been the case in recent years) may lead to overlapping investments in the same or competing infrastructure projects. The bottom line is that the relationships involve both competition and cooperation.

### **5. Central Asian Republics (CARs)**

#### **5.1. Economic Connectivity, Transit, and Trade**

Belt and Road Initiative identified Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan) as critical to construct and Pakistan as an access to the Arabian Sea. CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) provides an alternative to the traditional (cheaper and quicker) Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan route. Northern Sea Route.

Strong Pakistan-China relations could thereby be advantageous for the CARs. The stronger economic ties and better infrastructure the CARs have, the better they can diversify their trade routes, reduce economic dependence on Russia and Iran, and economically benefit from transit trade to Pakistan (Ahmad, Gill, Hussian, & Ismail, PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: POLITICAL AND ECONOMY COOPERATION THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF CPEC, 2024).

### **5.2. Security Spillovers**

One of the biggest challenges is to what extent the instability experienced in Pakistan (terrorism, insurgency and separatism) can cross borders to influence the spillovers experienced by the CARs in terms of militants, arms, and refugees. Also, the CARs have their worries over the prospect of China's counter terrorism and the range of xenophobic, illiberal, and authoritarian domestic policies (especially of Xinjiang concerning Central Asia) being adopted or projected onto Central Asia. Cooperation by Pakistan and China in the fields of intelligence, surveillance, and counterterrorism could imply for the CARs the possibility of adopting such policies, which could be a concern for citizens' rights and liberties or the indisputable and unqualified control by the state of its territory.

### **5.3. Impact on Foreign Relations**

Central Asian Republics have always tried to maintain equilibrium in their relations with Russia, China, and Iran. With Pakistan's growing ties with China, it is conceivable that the CARs could become more active and/or be more actively drawn into the China-dominated foreign policy on regional security, counterterrorism (e.g., the SCO), and other related investments. It may also generate increased rivalry for Chinese investments, especially since Pakistan is expected to be the more favored corridor state.

## **6. Countries bordering the Arabian Sea: Iran, Oman, Yemen, and Gulf Countries**

### **6.1. Strategic Naval Relations Drivers**

There are ramifications for the rest of the Arabian Sea region from China's strategic and deepening connection with the port development of Gwadar, as there are with the port, naval, and coast guard. Along with the "string of pearls" concept, Gwadar is important to CPEC and China's maritime access. Increased Chinese activity in the region may suggest the necessity to deploy naval and shipping protective provisions and the acquisition of possible dual-use facilities. Pakistan's hosting of such activities consolidates the role of the other shoreline states: Oman and Iran might rethink their port strategy. At the same time, the Gulf States may experience the emergence of a new competitor for maritime dominance. Studies evaluating the security aspects of CPEC are revealing that Pakistan-China cooperation's maritime dimension is more pronounced than previously assumed. The marine component of CPEC changes Pakistan's naval posture, coastal security, and sea environment risk (Shaikh, Arain, Khatti, & Rasool, 2025).

### **6.2. Energy and Resource Competition**

Littoral countries enjoy direct revenues from shipping, oil, gas pipelines, and LNG terminals. Investments by Chinese firms in Pakistan could ease reliance on Gulf energy, or, in opposition, Chinese companies may penetrate the energy supply and pipeline business in these countries. Iran and GCC countries will be curious observers of the impact of the Chinese-Pakistan nexus on energy security in the region. Iran may find changes to its strategic balance if China sources increased energy from Pakistan or invests in cross-regional pipeline infrastructure via Pakistan.

### **7.6.3. Security Cooperation and Rivalries**

On the other hand, China invests in the security of the routes of the Arabian Sea, requiring the cooperation or rivalry of the naval forces of Iran, Oman, or even India. All these countries have in common their anxiety concerning piracy, the unlawful traffic of arms, the strategic and commercial security of the seas, and all the routes that traverse the seas. On the other hand, China-Pakistan naval exercises, patrols, and some dual-use facilities may be met with indifference.

## **7. Broader Regional Impacts & Secondary Effects**

### **7.1 Non-State Actors and Militancy**

It is a known fact that the deepening Mozambican and Chinese relations parallel the risk of militant or separatist groups focusing attacks on Chinese nationals, infrastructure and projects. For instance, the Baloch Liberation Army has attacked the Gwadar port on numerous instances (Reuters, 2024), derailing attempts at the development of Chinese investment projects. The security incident in Gwadar demonstrates how Chinese spending and investment attracts a militant focus that the Pakistani state has to expend precious resources then to defend and protect Uzbekistan. The attacks adversely impact the internal security configuration of the state, but further have the potential to incite diplomatic tension with China, and erode foreign investment confidence in the region, along with the risk of the state getting embroiled in the militia activity of contiguous states like Iran and Central Asia.

### **7.2. Signalling Diplomacy and Alignments**

Pakistan's alignment with China also plays out in global Pakistan forums – the UN, SCO, BRI summits, climate forums, and counterterrorism regimes. Pakistan Dolziwan often supports China's positions, whether on Xinjiang, global governance, or trade policy. This has implications for how regional countries perceive their own diplomatic options: whether to hedge, align, or remain non-aligned. Aman & Yaseen (2025) note that the Pak-China strategic



partnership has become one more pillar in regional politics, including global governance, and a model of “mutually beneficial” cooperation in the current great power shifts.

### **7.3. Economic Corridors & Transit Competition**

With regional development timed and synchronised to the advancement of connectivity, the influence of the CPEC triggers competitive dynamics with other corridors, including India’s connectivity projects (e.g. Chabahar, the International North-South Transport Corridor), Iran’s Chabahar-Zahedan routes, and various Central Asian corridor projects. Some states may perceive a lack of incentive, perceiving a loss of trade patterns that shift in dominance to Pak-China routes. Additionally, the cost, quality, and safety of access to transit routes through Pakistan will have regional consequences.

### **7.4. Environmental, Social, and Governance Spillovers**

Massive infrastructure and maritime projects are bound to cause environmental hazards (coastal erosion, maritime pollution, water security), social conflict (benefit distribution, displacement, local dissatisfaction in Baluchistan and beyond), and governance problems (transparency, security first, and not inclusive development). They, in turn, can influence regional attitudes towards China-Pakistan projects, how other countries negotiate comparable projects, and can even become a source of conflict in case local environmental or human rights concerns spill over. The studies, such as *Beyond Borders: A New Analysis of External Challenges of CPEC* (Mahboob and Zhihui, 2024), have identified that not only Pakistan, but its neighbours and global supply chains are impacted by security, political, systemic and environmental challenges, which are outside of Pakistan.

## **8. Case Studies**

To give the above impact a concrete example, we look at a couple of recent cases:

### **8.1. Case Study A: Gwadar Port Security Incidents (2024).**

In March 2024, militants invaded the Gwadar port (Gwadar Port Authority Complex), targeting Chinese-invested infrastructure and resulting in the death and injury of some of the attackers and some Pakistani security personnel. The attack highlights the opposition of a Baloch separatist group (BLA) to Pakistani-Chinese projects in Balochistan.

Regional countries imply that there will be a lack of investor confidence in the Arabian Sea region. Iran, Oman or the Gulf states worry that the maritime gateways are vulnerable. This increases the protection costs of its foreign assets in case of China; it accentuates internal security problems of Pakistan, which could impact stability across borders.

### **8.2. Case Study B: Chinese Nationals in Karachi Are Targeted in Separatist Attacks (2024)**

In October 2024, two Chinese nationals were killed in a convoy outside Karachi airport, which the BLA claimed. The incident demonstrates that foreign nationals are directly targeted in Pakistan, which further worsens the relations between the countries, leads to increased security measures, and provides the Chinese investment flows with a chance to slow or stop.

Regional effects: forming a perception internationally of Pakistan as an unsafe country; China might require more assurances; neighbouring countries that are observing changes in the internal security situation of foreigners would be a ripple effect in the insurance or risk analysis of infrastructure projects in South Asia.

### **8.3. Case Study C: Pakistan in between China and the US**

According to Iftikhar Ali, Noraiz Arshad, and Roy Anthony Rogers (2024), the foreign policy of Pakistan is becoming a balancing act between China and a hedging act with the U.S. This balancing exercise has repercussions on the countries in the region that observe the effects on the strategic choices made by Pakistan on the wider alliances. India and Afghanistan are examples, as they observe Pakistan-US ties in terms of military aid; Iran in terms of Pakistan-US aid signals toward cross-border militancy and China-US competition in terms of Pakistan technologies (such as artificial intelligence, possibly) may lead regional nations to either ally or ally.

## **9. Challenges and Opportunities**

Although the effects listed above are significant, some counter-forces and threats can restrict or influence the implications on the regional countries.

### **9.1. The security risks and local resistance**

The cost is seen to be sustained militant actions against Chinese nationals and projects (such as in Gwadar, Karachi) that would divert resources of Pakistan, potentially delaying project schedules. The legitimacy can be decreased and the instability increased by local opposition in Balochistan (over distribution of benefits, environmental concerns, land rights). These internal processes do not remain within themselves; spillover effects can be felt in border areas in Iran and perceptions of security in India.

### **9.2. Economic, Financial and Debt Risks**

The amounts of debt and reliance on Chinese investment in Pakistan subject it to financial pressure. Financial crisis in Pakistan would spill over to China (non-performing projects), to regional investors and could also impact the viability of transit corridors benefiting the neighbor states. The attractiveness of Pakistan as a transit route can be diminished by uncertainty of payments, cost overruns, delayed projects and inflation.

### 9.3. Diplomatic Pushback and Regional Rivalries

Other countries, such as India, have come out forcefully to oppose the role of China in Pakistan, particularly in the contentious territories. Moreover, not only some regional powers (e.g. Iran, Central Asian states) might be squeezed by Pakistan-China alignments, but also they might pursue counter-alliances. As an illustration, Iran is working closer with India or Russia; Central Asia is working closer with the West or with India to balance the influence of China. There can be an increase in diplomatic tensions.

### 9.4. Environmental and Human Rights Concerns

Projects that avoid environmental protection or social justice (resettlement, labour rights, local inclusion) can lead to both local and international backlash. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the international civil society might influence regional states to place greater attention to the Chinese projects. This may affect the way infrastructure projects are negotiated in the future on a regional scale.

## 10. Regional Security Architecture Implications

When you add all these effects together, we get to see some wider implications:

### 10.1 Changes in Alliance and Multilateral Structures.

Pakistan-China collaboration also enhances the platforms such as the SCO, BRICS and CPEC-oriented multilateral interactions. Depending on their perceived utility, other regional actors will move towards or away from them. To illustrate, India can become even more active in the Quad and more assertive in alliances with Western states. There could be more participation of Afghanistan and the Central Asian states in the China-led security dialogues, particularly in counterterrorism or protection of infrastructure.

### 10.2. New Security Priorities

Maritime security (sea lanes, port security), counterterrorism (with special attention to attacks on the BRI/CPEC targets), cybersecurity (due to reliance on Chinese technology and new digital infrastructure), and border control are gaining more centrality. The countries in the region will be forced to spend more on surveillance, intelligence sharing, counterinsurgency, and possibly combined naval patrols.

### 10.3 Economic Integration and Dependency

Connectedness has offered economic integration: commerce, transit, and market. However, dependency risks also increase: those countries that are either highly engaged or dependent on the CPEC-related routes can see their economies being dependent on Pakistan-China diplomatic choices, the security of the project, the financial stability, and China's policy on the global level.

### 10.4. Strategic Stability and Risk of Conflict

With conflicting claims (especially between India and Pakistan), military build-ups, nuclear brinkmanship, and border militancy, the probability that the two countries will make a mistake escalates. Chinese presence has the capability of stabilising (through deterrence) and destabilising (through the emboldening of some actors). This balance is changing and countries of the region have to adapt to it.

### 10.5. Regional Country Policy Recommendations.

Considering this mapping of implications, what can the countries of the region do to manoeuvre the relationship between Pakistan and China in the Xi era in such a way that it does not compromise the interests of the countries but instead minimises the risk?

- Enhance Varied Diplomatic Interactions: The countries in the region need to keep a balance of relations- they need to relate to China, though they need to improve ties with other powers to prevent over-dependence.
- Improve Regional Security Cooperation: Multilateral counterterrorism, maritime security, and intelligence forums (such as through SCO or regional maritime groups) to deal with cross-border threats.
- Negotiate Terms of Connectivity Projects: In any case of Pakistan-China cooperation in corridors or ports, the states are required to place provisions that guarantee local goods, nature, legality (e.g. transit rights, tariff schemes), and risk alleviation.
- Invest in Domestic and Border-Region Resilience: Empower border management, infrastructure, and communities along the borders to become resistant to violence spillovers or disruptions of the infrastructure.
- Hold Projects Accountable and Open: To avoid strong reactions, both locally and by neighbours, projects under CPEC or Chinese investment must meet good governance, environmental and social impact, and inclusion in the local context.
- Strengthen Cyber and Digital Sovereignty: As China increasingly takes part in technology, surveillance, and AI, regional neighbours need to create cybersecurity, data protection, diversify tech vendors, and strike good deals.

In the case of Pakistan-China, relations between the two countries shifted from a relationship of friendship and limited strategic collaboration to one of a tightly-knit partnership in the areas of defence, infrastructure, economic progression, and international political/diplomatic alignment. These relationships have far-reaching implications for the nations of the region, catalysing both benefits (trading, interconnectedness, collective security) and harms (militancy, dependence, diplomatic burden, environmental/social externalities). With the strategic environment of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Arabian Sea littoral increasingly competitive, the way the states of the region will react to the Pakistan-China nexus will greatly influence regional security structures as well as economic integration in the next decade.

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