JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal

ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

PAKISTAN–CHINA RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, ECONOMIC COOPERATION, AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23257306

Keywords:
Pakistan–China Relations, Strategic Partnership, CPEC, Belt and Road Initiative, Economic Cooperation

Article History
Received: 25 June 2026
Accepted: 16 September 2026
Published: 09 October 2026

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Abstract
This study examines Pakistan–China relations in the 21st century, with particular emphasis on strategic partnership, economic cooperation, and emerging challenges. Pakistan and China have maintained close diplomatic relations for decades, which have gradually developed into a comprehensive strategic partnership encompassing defense, diplomacy, trade, infrastructure, energy, and regional connectivity. The changing nature of bilateral relations in the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), highlighting their significance for Pakistan's economic development, connectivity, and strategic position. It also examines cooperation in defense and security, particularly in the context of regional developments in South Asia. At the same time, the relationship faces challenges including economic constraints, security concerns, regional geopolitical competition, trade imbalances, and difficulties in implementing major development projects. Using a qualitative approach based on secondary sources, the study analyzes the opportunities and challenges shaping Pakistan–China relations and assesses the evolving dynamics of their strategic and economic partnership in the contemporary international system.

Introduction

Pakistan–China relations constitute one of the most significant and enduring bilateral partnerships in contemporary Asian politics. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1951, the two countries have gradually developed close political, diplomatic, economic, and strategic ties. Although the relationship initially developed within the broader geopolitical environment of the Cold War, it has evolved considerably in the twenty-first century. The partnership has increasingly expanded beyond traditional security cooperation to encompass trade, investment, infrastructure development, energy, technology, regional connectivity, and multilateral diplomacy. Consequently, Pakistan and China now describe their relationship as an "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership," reflecting the depth and continuity of their bilateral engagement (Hussain, et, al, 2020).

The beginning of the twenty-first century brought significant changes to the international and regional strategic environment, creating new opportunities for Pakistan–China cooperation. The rise of China as a major economic and political power, changing relations among the United States, China, and India, instability in Afghanistan, and Pakistan's security and economic challenges have

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ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
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contributed to the strategic importance of the bilateral relationship. From Pakistan's perspective, China represents an important source of diplomatic, economic, technological, and defence cooperation. For China, Pakistan occupies an important position in South Asia because of its geographical location, access to the Arabian Sea, and potential role in regional connectivity. These shared interests have strengthened bilateral cooperation and encouraged both states to deepen their strategic coordination (Ali, et, al, 2020). A major transformation in Pakistan–China relations occurred with the emergence of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Announced in 2013 as a major component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), CPEC broadened the relationship from predominantly strategic and defence cooperation toward economic and developmental cooperation. It focuses on connectivity, energy, infrastructure, Gwadar, industrial development, agriculture, and other areas of economic cooperation. CPEC has therefore become a central pillar of contemporary Pakistan–China relations and has connected bilateral relations with wider questions of regional economic integration and geopolitical competition.

The official CPEC framework presents the corridor as a mechanism for improving connectivity, trade, energy cooperation, and regional economic integration. Economic cooperation has become increasingly important in determining the future direction of the bilateral relationship. During the first phase of CPEC, Chinese investment contributed significantly to Pakistan's energy and infrastructure sectors, while subsequent cooperation has sought to expand toward industrialization, agriculture, science and technology, and business-to-business cooperation. The transition toward CPEC Phase II reflects an attempt to move from infrastructure-led cooperation toward broader economic and productive partnerships. In September 2025, the two countries reaffirmed their commitment to an upgraded CPEC and identified new areas of cooperation, including industrial development and economic growth (Government of Pakistan, 2025).

Strategic and defence cooperation remains another fundamental dimension of Pakistan–China relations. The two states have developed extensive cooperation in defence production, military training, strategic consultations, and security affairs. This cooperation is influenced by their shared concerns regarding regional stability and changing geopolitical dynamics in South Asia. Pakistan views its relationship with China as an important component of its national security and foreign-policy strategy, while China considers Pakistan an important partner in maintaining regional stability and advancing its interests in South Asia. Scholarly studies suggest that strategic cooperation has remained a central feature of the relationship even as economic ties have expanded during the twenty-first century (Aman, et, al, 2025).

The relationship also has important implications for regional geopolitics. Pakistan and China share concerns regarding the evolving strategic environment involving India, the United States, Afghanistan, and the broader Indo-Pacific region. The growing strategic competition between China and the United States and the strengthening of India–United States relations have further complicated the regional environment in which Pakistan–China relations operate. Consequently, the bilateral partnership cannot be examined only from a bilateral perspective; it must also be understood within the broader transformation of Asian geopolitics. The strategic partnership has increasingly become connected with questions of regional security, connectivity, great-power competition, and the balance of power (Aman & Yaseen, 2025). Despite the considerable expansion of bilateral cooperation, Pakistan–China relations also face several emerging challenges. Security threats to Chinese citizens and projects in Pakistan have become a significant concern, particularly for the implementation and continuity of CPEC projects. In addition, political instability, economic difficulties, administrative weaknesses, delays in project implementation, and local concerns regarding development

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projects can affect the effectiveness of bilateral economic cooperation. Recent scholarship highlights the need to address security concerns, local grievances, transparency, and inclusive development in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the strategic partnership (Mohsin et al., 2025).

The contemporary relationship is consequently moving toward a broader and more multidimensional partnership. In 2025, the leadership of both countries reaffirmed their commitment to an "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership," while emphasizing the importance of CPEC and broader cooperation in economic development. In May 2026, during the 75th anniversary year of diplomatic relations, the two sides again emphasized strategic coordination and identified industrialization, connectivity, science and technology, agriculture, clean energy, and digital transformation as important areas for future cooperation (Government of Pakistan, 2026).

This demonstrates that the relationship is no longer confined to conventional diplomacy and security but increasingly encompasses development and emerging sectors. Therefore, Pakistan–China relations in the twenty-first century represent a complex combination of strategic interests, economic interdependence, geopolitical considerations, and emerging challenges. The partnership has demonstrated considerable resilience because of shared strategic interests, sustained political engagement, and expanding economic cooperation. Nevertheless, its future trajectory will depend on Pakistan's ability to address economic and security challenges, ensure effective implementation of CPEC, strengthen institutional capacity, and ensure that development benefits are broadly distributed. This study therefore examines Pakistan–China relations in the twenty-first century by focusing on three interconnected dimensions: the strategic partnership between the two states, the expansion of economic cooperation particularly through CPEC, and the emerging challenges that may influence the future of this important bilateral relationship.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine Pakistan–China Relations in the 21st Century: Strategic Partnership, Economic Cooperation, and Emerging Challenges. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to understand the nature, evolution, and implications of Pakistan–China relations rather than measure them statistically. The research focuses on three major dimensions: strategic cooperation, economic cooperation, particularly the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the emerging challenges affecting the bilateral relationship.

Theoretical Framework

Complex Interdependence Theory

The Complex Interdependence Theory as its primary theoretical framework to analyze Pakistan–China Relations in the 21st Century: Strategic Partnership, Economic Cooperation, and Emerging Challenges. The theory was developed by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in their influential work Power and Interdependence, first published in 1977 and subsequently revised in later editions. The theory challenges the traditional realist assumption that international politics is primarily determined by military power and state-to-state conflict. Instead, Keohane and Nye argue that contemporary international relations are characterized by multiple forms of interdependence involving states, economic actors, institutions, and transnational relationships (Keohane & Nye, 2012). A central proposition of Complex Interdependence Theory is that states become increasingly connected through multiple channels of interaction. These channels include formal relations among governments, informal relationships among governmental agencies, businesses, societies, and international organizations. In the context of Pakistan–China relations, these multiple channels can be observed through diplomatic exchanges, bilateral trade, Chinese investment, CPEC projects, defence cooperation, educational exchanges, technological cooperation, and institutional mechanisms such as the Joint

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Cooperation Committee. Therefore, the theory provides a useful framework for understanding why contemporary Pakistan–China relations extend beyond conventional diplomatic and military cooperation.

Strategic and Security Partnership

Pakistan–China strategic and security relations represent one of the most enduring dimensions of their bilateral partnership. Since the 1960s, regional security dynamics, particularly tensions involving India, have encouraged Islamabad and Beijing to develop closer strategic coordination. Over time, this cooperation has expanded from diplomatic support to defence agreements, military training, arms cooperation, joint exercises, intelligence coordination, and counterterrorism efforts. The strategic partnership has remained an important pillar of Pakistan's foreign and security policy, while China regards Pakistan as an important partner in South Asia Defence cooperation constitutes a central component of the strategic partnership. Pakistan has acquired a range of Chinese military equipment and technologies, while the two countries have developed cooperation in defence production. This collaboration has included aircraft, naval platforms, missiles, air-defence systems, and other military technologies. Joint defence production has become particularly significant because it allows Pakistan to strengthen its military capabilities while providing China with an established partner in South Asia. Such cooperation has consequently developed into a long-term institutional relationship rather than being limited to arms purchases (Farooq, et, al, 2025).

Military exercises have further strengthened strategic cooperation between Pakistan and China. The two countries conduct regular joint exercises involving their armed forces, including air and naval exercises. These activities provide opportunities for the exchange of military experience, improvement of operational coordination, and development of interoperability between the two militaries. The regularity of such exercises demonstrates the depth of defence relations and reflects the broader strategic confidence that has developed between Islamabad and Beijing. Counterterrorism has also become an increasingly important area of bilateral security cooperation. Both countries face security concerns associated with terrorism and violent extremism, although the nature and geographical context of these threats differ. China has particular concerns regarding the security of its citizens and investments in Pakistan, while Pakistan has sought greater cooperation with China in addressing militant threats. Consequently, intelligence sharing, counterterrorism coordination, and security arrangements for Chinese personnel and projects have become important elements of the contemporary strategic relationship (Ismail, 2022).

The strategic partnership is also influenced by the India factor**.** Pakistan and China have developed closer strategic relations partly because both countries have experienced significant disputes with India. Pakistan considers China's strategic and defence cooperation important for maintaining its security position vis-à-vis India, while China has its own longstanding territorial and strategic competition with India. The convergence of these interests has contributed to closer Pakistan–China coordination. However, this relationship should not be understood solely as an anti-India alliance, because Pakistan and China also possess independent economic, diplomatic, and regional interests. Afghanistan represents another important dimension of Pakistan–China security cooperation. The geographical proximity of Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan creates shared concerns regarding terrorism, extremism, political instability, and regional connectivity. China has increasingly supported diplomatic efforts aimed at promoting stability in Afghanistan, while Pakistan has historically maintained significant political and security interests in the country. Cooperation among Pakistan and China regarding Afghanistan has therefore become increasingly relevant to their broader regional security agenda (Tykhonenko, et, al, 2026).

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The strategic partnership has also expanded into the maritime domain, particularly through cooperation surrounding Gwadar Port and the Arabian Sea. Gwadar occupies an important geographical position near major international maritime routes. China's involvement in Gwadar is associated with its broader connectivity objectives under the Belt and Road Initiative, while Pakistan views the port as an important component of its economic and strategic development. Consequently, maritime security, port protection, and regional connectivity have become increasingly connected with Pakistan–China strategic cooperation. The broader geo-political level, Pakistan–China strategic relations are influenced by the changing balance of power in Asia. The rise of China, growing strategic competition between China and the United States, strengthening India–United States relations, and developments in the Indo-Pacific have created a more complex regional environment. Pakistan and China have therefore increased diplomatic coordination on regional and international issues. Pakistan's relationship with China provides Islamabad with an important diplomatic and strategic partner, while China benefits from Pakistan's geographical position and its role in South Asian and Muslim-world affairs (Ismail, M. 2023).

The Pakistan–China strategic and security cooperation has evolved from traditional defence collaboration into a multidimensional security partnership encompassing defence production, military exercises, counterterrorism, intelligence cooperation, CPEC security, maritime interests, and regional diplomacy. The partnership has demonstrated considerable resilience because of shared strategic interests and sustained political engagement. However, security threats, geopolitical competition, Pakistan's internal political and economic challenges, and the security of Chinese personnel remain important concerns. The future strength of the strategic partnership will therefore depend on both countries' ability to address these challenges while maintaining effective institutional and diplomatic coordination.

Economic Cooperation and CPEC

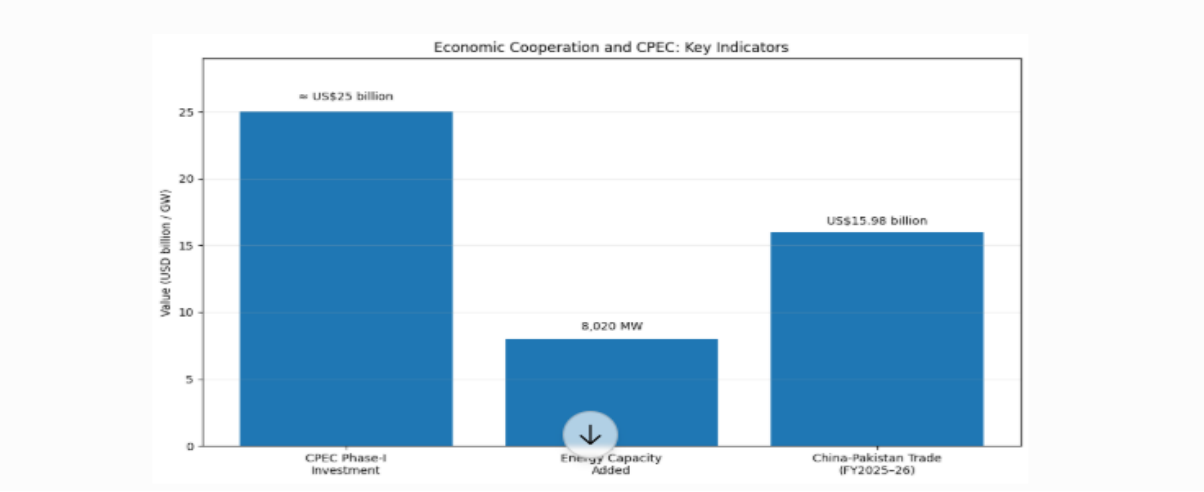
Economic cooperation has become one of the most important dimensions of contemporary Pakistan–China relations. While the relationship was initially dominated by strategic and security considerations, economic engagement has expanded considerably in the twenty-first century. Bilateral cooperation now covers trade, investment, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, industry, information technology, science and technology, and regional connectivity. This transformation reflects the growing economic interdependence between the two countries and has given economic relations a central position within their broader strategic partnership. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) represents the most prominent expression of this expanding economic relationship. CPEC was developed as a major component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with the objective of strengthening connectivity between Pakistan and China while promoting infrastructure and economic development. Its broad framework includes transport infrastructure, energy, Gwadar Port, industrial cooperation, agriculture, and other sectors. The CPEC Long-Term Plan identifies Pakistan's geographical position between South Asia, China, and Central Asia as an important basis for developing regional connectivity and economic cooperation. Infrastructure development has been a major component of the first phase of CPEC. Investment has supported roads, transport networks, energy infrastructure, and telecommunications connectivity. According to Pakistan's CPEC Secretariat, approximately US$25 billion in Chinese investment was made during Phase I, while around 8,000 MW of power-generation capacity was added to Pakistan's electricity system (Husnain, et,al, 2025),

The energy sector has occupied a particularly important position within CPEC cooperation. Pakistan has historically faced electricity shortages and constraints in energy generation, making energy investment an important component of its development strategy. CPEC-related energy projects have contributed

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additional generation capacity and have been presented by the Pakistani government as an important achievement of the first phase. At the same time, the long-term economic impact of energy cooperation depends on the sustainability of projects, financing arrangements, energy-sector reforms, and Pakistan's ability to manage associated economic obligations. Gwadar Port is another significant element of CPEC and Pakistan–China economic cooperation. Gwadar is strategically located on the Arabian Sea and is intended to contribute to maritime connectivity, trade, logistics, and regional economic activity. The development of Gwadar is connected with broader plans for industrialization and economic zones. Under the evolving CPEC framework, Pakistan and China have continued to emphasize Gwadar development and the creation of economic activities capable of generating employment and value-added production. Industrial cooperation represents an important transition in the development of CPEC. Whereas the first phase placed considerable emphasis on infrastructure and energy, the emerging second phase seeks greater attention to industrialization, Special Economic Zones, agriculture, mining, information technology, science and technology, and business-to-business cooperation**.** In September 2025, the 14th Joint Cooperation Committee meeting formally emphasized CPEC Phase II and identified industrial cooperation, agricultural modernization, maritime development, mining, and connectivity as important areas for future cooperation (Hassan, et, al, 2025).



Source: Pakistan Economic Survey 2025–26; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

Trade is another important dimension of Pakistan–China economic relations. China has become a major trading partner for Pakistan, but the structure of bilateral trade presents both opportunities and challenges. Pakistan seeks greater access to the Chinese market and aims to increase exports of agricultural products, textiles, minerals, and other goods. The World Bank has noted that improved physical connectivity alone does not automatically produce substantial trade gains; improvements in Pakistan's business environment, customs procedures, regulatory systems, and market access are also necessary to increase exports. CPEC has also created opportunities for agricultural cooperation and technology transfer**.** Pakistan and China have expanded cooperation involving agricultural modernization, training, mechanization, agricultural technology, and value-added production. In 2026, bilateral consultations under CPEC 2.0 included agricultural mechanization, farmer training, halal meat exports, aquaculture, seafood processing, and other business-to-business opportunities. Such

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cooperation indicates an effort to connect CPEC with productive sectors of Pakistan's economy rather than concentrating exclusively on large infrastructure projects (javed, et, al, 2025).

Despite these opportunities, economic cooperation and CPEC face several challenges. Pakistan needs to improve its export capacity, business environment, institutional coordination, and regulatory framework to obtain greater economic benefits from connectivity and investment. Security concerns affecting Chinese personnel and projects also have implications for the continuity of economic cooperation. Furthermore, the success of CPEC Phase II will depend on effective implementation, stronger private-sector participation, industrial competitiveness, and the ability to translate infrastructure and investment into sustainable employment, exports, and productivity. Therefore, CPEC should be understood not only as an infrastructure initiative but as an evolving component of the broader economic and strategic relationship between Pakistan and China.

Emerging Challenges

Pakistan–China relations have developed into a broad strategic and economic partnership, but the relationship also faces several emerging challenges that may influence its future trajectory. These challenges are not limited to bilateral disagreements; they include security threats, economic constraints, political instability, geopolitical competition, implementation difficulties, and social and environmental concerns surrounding major development projects. Understanding these challenges is essential for assessing the sustainability of Pakistan–China cooperation in the twenty-first century.

Security Threats to Chinese Nationals and Projects

Security threats to Chinese nationals and CPEC-related projects have emerged as a major challenge in Pakistan–China relations. Chinese engineers, workers, and business personnel are involved in infrastructure, energy, mining, and other development projects across Pakistan, making their safety an important concern for both governments. Terrorist attacks targeting Chinese citizens and project personnel have created security concerns and, in some cases, disrupted economic activities. These incidents have encouraged Pakistan to strengthen security arrangements around Chinese personnel and strategic projects. The security dimension has therefore become closely connected with the continuation and expansion of bilateral economic cooperation (Staniland, et, al, 2026).

The security challenge is particularly important because CPEC involves geographically dispersed projects and long-term Chinese investment. Attacks or threats against Chinese personnel can affect investor confidence, increase project costs, and create delays in implementation. Pakistan has established dedicated security mechanisms and has repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to protecting Chinese citizens and CPEC projects. China, meanwhile, has emphasized the need for effective security measures as a prerequisite for the continued expansion of economic cooperation. Consequently, counterterrorism cooperation, intelligence sharing, and coordination between Pakistani and Chinese security institutions have become increasingly important components of the bilateral relationship.

Pakistan's Economic and Debt Challenges

Pakistan's economic difficulties represent another important challenge for the sustainability of economic cooperation with China. The country has faced fiscal pressures, external financing requirements, balance-of-payments difficulties, inflation, and limited foreign-exchange reserves. These economic conditions can affect Pakistan's ability to finance development projects and meet financial obligations associated with infrastructure and energy investments. Although CPEC has provided significant investment and infrastructure opportunities, Pakistan needs stronger economic institutions, greater export competitiveness, and sustainable fiscal policies

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to maximize the long-term benefits of bilateral economic cooperation (Ahmed, 2019).

Debt-related concerns have also become part of the debate surrounding Pakistan's economic relationship with China. It is important to distinguish between different forms of Chinese financing, including loans, foreign direct investment, and financing associated with energy projects, rather than treating all Chinese investment as conventional government debt. Nevertheless, Pakistan's broader external debt and repayment pressures can affect its capacity to undertake new projects and maintain existing financial commitments. The sustainability of CPEC therefore depends not only on the volume of investment but also on project profitability, Pakistan's economic growth, export performance, and effective financial management (World Bank, 2020).

Political Instability and Policy Continuity

Political instability in Pakistan represents an important challenge to the continuity of long-term cooperation with China. Frequent changes in governments, political polarization, institutional tensions, and shifts in economic priorities can affect the implementation of major development projects. Since CPEC involves long-term investments and projects extending across several years, consistent policies and institutional coordination are necessary for effective implementation. Policy uncertainty can also influence investor confidence and create delays in decision-making. Therefore, maintaining policy continuity and strengthening institutional coordination are important for sustaining Pakistan–China economic cooperation (Khan & Kasi, 2017).

Implementation Challenges of CPEC

The implementation of CPEC faces several institutional, administrative, financial, and security-related challenges. Delays in project execution can result from bureaucratic procedures, coordination problems between federal and provincial institutions, financing issues, land acquisition, regulatory requirements, and security concerns. The transition from the infrastructure-focused first phase toward CPEC Phase II, emphasizing industrialization, agriculture, technology, and private-sector investment, requires stronger institutional capacity and effective coordination. The long-term success of CPEC therefore depends on efficient implementation rather than merely announcing or financing projects (Faisal, 2020).

Local Concerns and Environmental Issues

Local communities may raise concerns regarding employment, land acquisition, compensation, resource distribution, and their participation in CPEC-related development. If local populations perceive that major projects do not provide sufficient employment or socioeconomic benefits, questions about inclusiveness and equitable development may emerge. These concerns are particularly significant in areas where infrastructure, energy, mining, and port-related projects affect local livelihoods. Meaningful consultation with local communities and transparent distribution of development benefits can contribute to greater social acceptance of major projects.

Environmental concerns are also relevant to the long-term sustainability of CPEC. Large-scale roads, energy projects, mining activities, industrial development, and urban expansion may place pressure on ecosystems, water resources, biodiversity, and local landscapes. Environmental impacts can vary considerably according to the type and location of each project, making project-specific environmental assessment important. Sustainable development therefore requires environmental safeguards, appropriate impact assessments, efficient resource management, and the integration of environmental considerations into CPEC planning.

Geo-political Competition Involving the United States and China

Increasing strategic competition between the United States and China has created a more complex international environment for Pakistan. China is an important strategic and economic partner of Pakistan, while the United States remains an important international actor

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with longstanding political, economic, and security relations with Islamabad. Intensifying U.S.–China competition in areas such as trade, technology, maritime security, and the Indo-Pacific can create diplomatic pressures for countries that maintain relations with both powers. Pakistan therefore faces the challenge of managing its relationship with China while maintaining constructive engagement with other major international partners (Ahmad, et, al, 2025).

The geopolitical significance of CPEC also contributes to this complexity. China's investment in infrastructure and connectivity through the Belt and Road Initiative is viewed by Beijing as an economic and developmental initiative, while some external analysts interpret such projects through a broader geopolitical and strategic lens. Pakistan's location, Gwadar Port, and its role in regional connectivity further increase the strategic significance of the partnership. Consequently, Pakistan's foreign policy requires careful management of its relations with China, the United States, India, and other regional actors while prioritizing national economic and security interests (Small, 2015).

Conclusion

Pakistan–China relations have evolved significantly from diplomatic cooperation established in 1951 into a comprehensive strategic and economic partnership in the twenty-first century. The relationship has expanded beyond traditional diplomatic and defence cooperation to include trade, investment, infrastructure, energy, technology, regional connectivity, and development. Strategic convergence, mutual diplomatic support, and shared regional interests have provided a strong foundation for the continuity of bilateral relations. The development of CPEC has further transformed the relationship by connecting strategic cooperation with broader economic and developmental objectives. The study demonstrates that strategic and security cooperation remains a fundamental pillar of Pakistan–China relations. Defence cooperation, military exercises, counterterrorism coordination, and regional security consultations have strengthened mutual strategic ties. At the same time, economic cooperation and CPEC have introduced new dimensions into the partnership. CPEC has contributed to infrastructure development, energy generation, connectivity, and investment while creating opportunities for industrialization, agriculture, technology, and trade. However, the benefits of economic cooperation depend on effective implementation, economic sustainability, institutional capacity, and Pakistan's ability to improve its productive and export capabilities.

The partnership faces several challenges. Security threats to Chinese nationals and projects, Pakistan's economic and debt pressures, political instability, policy discontinuity, CPEC implementation difficulties, local concerns, environmental issues, and wider geopolitical competition can affect the future trajectory of bilateral relations. The growing strategic competition between China and the United States and the complex India–China–Pakistan relationship have further complicated the regional environment. Therefore, the future of Pakistan–China relations will depend not only on maintaining political goodwill but also on effectively managing these practical and geopolitical challenges.

Overall, Pakistan–China relations remain a multidimensional partnership in which strategic interests, economic interdependence, and regional geopolitics are closely interconnected. CPEC has created significant opportunities, but its long-term success requires a shift from project-based cooperation toward sustainable economic transformation. Pakistan needs to strengthen institutional capacity, improve economic governance, enhance security, promote exports, and ensure greater local participation. China, meanwhile, can continue supporting Pakistan's development through investment, technology transfer, industrial cooperation, and capacity building. Effective management of these dimensions can contribute to a more sustainable and mutually beneficial bilateral relationship.

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Recommendations

Strengthen Security Mechanisms: Pakistan should further strengthen security arrangements for Chinese nationals, workers, and CPEC projects. Intelligence sharing, coordination among security institutions, and community-based security approaches should be enhanced to reduce security risks.

Ensure Political and Policy Continuity: CPEC and other long-term bilateral projects should be treated as national development initiatives rather than short-term political programs. Successive governments should maintain policy consistency and institutional mechanisms for continuity.

Improve Economic Sustainability: Pakistan should prioritize economically viable projects and strengthen fiscal and debt-management mechanisms. Greater attention should be given to projects capable of generating exports, employment, productivity, and sustainable revenue.

Promote Industrialization and Exports: CPEC Phase II should place greater emphasis on Special Economic Zones, manufacturing, technology, agriculture, and export-oriented industries. Pakistan should seek greater access to the Chinese market for Pakistani agricultural, textile, mineral, and manufactured products.

Strengthen Private-Sector Cooperation: Bilateral economic cooperation should increasingly involve Pakistani and Chinese private-sector enterprises. Business-to-business partnerships can help transform CPEC from predominantly government-led infrastructure cooperation into broader commercial and productive activity.

Enhance Local Participation: Local communities should be meaningfully involved in development planning. Employment opportunities, skills training, compensation mechanisms, and local business participation should be incorporated into CPEC projects to ensure that development benefits reach affected communities.

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