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PAKISTAN–CHINA RELATIONS AT 75: DIPLOMATIC EVOLUTION, STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT, AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Pakistan–China relations have evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership characterized by diplomatic cooperation, economic interdependence, and regional security collaboration. As the relationship approaches its 75th anniversary in 2026, this study examines its historical evolution, strategic foundations, major achievements, and emerging challenges. It explores bilateral cooperation in defence, trade, infrastructure development, energy, and regional connectivity, with particular emphasis on the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The study also analyses challenges, including Pakistan's economic vulnerabilities, security threats to Chinese nationals and projects, regional geopolitical competition, trade imbalances, and delays in infrastructure development. Using a qualitative research methodology based on secondary sources, including academic literature, official documents, policy reports, and media publications, the research assesses the sustainability and future direction of bilateral relations. It argues that strengthening economic cooperation, improving security arrangements, expanding technological collaboration, and promoting people-to-people exchanges are essential for transforming this longstanding partnership into a more balanced, resilient, and mutually beneficial relationship amid changing regional and global dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan–China relations constitute an important case study in the study of international relations, strategic partnerships, and regional geopolitics. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations on May 21, 1951, the two countries have progressively expanded their engagement from diplomatic interaction to cooperation in defence, trade, infrastructure development, technology, and regional connectivity. The seventy-fifth anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2026 provides an opportunity to examine the historical

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foundations, strategic priorities, and future prospects of this partnership. The joint statement issued during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to China in May 2026 reaffirmed both governments' commitment to strengthening their strategic partnership, implementing the 2025–2029 Action Plan, and advancing cooperation in economic development, security, and regional affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2026).

In the twenty-first century, Pakistan–China relations have acquired an increasingly significant economic dimension. China's economic growth and expanding international engagement have created opportunities for cooperation in infrastructure, energy, transportation, trade, and industrial development. For Pakistan, cooperation with China represents an opportunity to improve infrastructure, attract investment, strengthen productive capacity, and diversify international economic relations. For China, Pakistan provides an important partner in South Asia and a potential route for regional connectivity linking western China with Pakistan's Arabian Sea coast. However, the economic benefits of bilateral cooperation depend on project implementation, commercial viability, domestic institutional capacity, and the ability of investments to generate sustainable economic activity. Consequently, the relationship requires analysis beyond diplomatic declarations and strategic symbolism.

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), launched in 2013, represents a major development in the economic relationship. As a flagship component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), CPEC encompasses transport connectivity, energy cooperation, infrastructure development, Gwadar Port, and plans for industrial collaboration. The Long Term Plan for China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (2017–2030) identifies multiple areas of cooperation, including transport, energy, industrial parks, agriculture, tourism, and socioeconomic development (Government of Pakistan & National Development and Reform Commission of China, 2017). Although these initiatives offer opportunities for economic transformation, their long-term contribution depends on the quality of implementation, the sustainability of financing arrangements, export development, employment generation, and the participation of domestic enterprises. This distinction is important because infrastructure development does not automatically produce industrial growth or equitable socioeconomic benefits. Strategic management has therefore become an essential dimension of contemporary Pakistan–China relations. In this context, strategic management refers to the processes through which both governments formulate shared objectives, coordinate institutions, allocate resources, manage risks, and assess the implementation of bilateral agreements. High-level diplomatic meetings establish political direction, but effective cooperation also requires administrative coordination, transparent procedures, realistic planning, and measurable performance indicators. The 2026 joint statement emphasized the continuation of strategic dialogue, stronger defence and security cooperation, and progress under the bilateral Action Plan for 2025–2029 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2026).

Despite the continuity of diplomatic engagement, Pakistan–China relations face several emerging challenges. Pakistan's economic constraints, including external financing requirements, limited export diversification, and institutional implementation difficulties, may affect the pace and sustainability of development projects. Security threats against Chinese nationals and infrastructure have also created significant operational concerns. At the regional level, India–China competition, Pakistan–India tensions, developments in Afghanistan, and wider strategic competition among major powers influence the environment in which bilateral cooperation takes place. The Pakistan–China relations within these wider geopolitical dynamics, highlighting the importance of understanding the partnership in relation to broader regional security

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considerations. These challenges do not necessarily undermine bilateral cooperation, but they require continued diplomatic coordination, effective risk management, and policies responsive to changing domestic and international circumstances. Another important dimension concerns the relationship between strategic connectivity and local development. Regions situated along the China–Pakistan connectivity route, particularly Gilgit-Baltistan, possess geographical significance because of the Karakoram Highway and the Khunjerab Pass. Improved connectivity may create opportunities for tourism, agricultural trade, logistics, education, and small-business development. However, the mountainous environment also presents challenges involving climate-related hazards, infrastructure maintenance, and ecological vulnerability. The 2026 bilateral joint statement identified the phased advancement of the Karakoram Highway realignment project and the strengthening of land connectivity through the Khunjerab Pass as areas of cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2026). Evaluating these initiatives requires attention not only to national connectivity objectives but also to local employment, environmental protection, community participation, and the distribution of development benefits.

The theoretical understanding of Pakistan–China relations also requires a multidimensional approach. Realism helps explain how national interests, security concerns, and regional power dynamics influence bilateral cooperation. However, economic and institutional relations cannot be understood exclusively through military or geopolitical considerations. Keohane and Nye (1977), through Complex Interdependence Theory, demonstrate the importance of multiple channels of interaction and the connections between political and economic relationships. Applied to Pakistan–China relations, this perspective highlights the interaction of diplomacy, trade, infrastructure, education, technology, and security. Strategic Management Theory further complements these approaches by focusing on the institutional capacity required to convert political commitments into measurable outcomes. Together, these perspectives provide a framework for examining both the durability of the relationship and the practical challenges affecting its future.

Against this background, the present study examines Pakistan–China relations at the seventy-fifth anniversary milestone through three interconnected dimensions: diplomatic evolution, strategic management, and emerging challenges. It seeks to understand how the relationship has developed since 1951, how strategic interests and economic interdependence shape contemporary cooperation, and how domestic, regional, and international conditions influence bilateral policy implementation. The study adopts a qualitative research design based on historical analysis and documentary review of official statements, policy documents, academic publications, and relevant institutional reports. It argues that the long-term sustainability of Pakistan–China relations depends not only on continued diplomatic trust but also on economic diversification, effective institutional coordination, responsible security arrangements, environmental sustainability, and inclusive development. By integrating historical, theoretical, and policy perspectives, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of how long-standing strategic partnerships can adapt to changing international conditions while pursuing mutually beneficial outcomes.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design. It combines historical analysis with contemporary policy assessment to investigate the evolution of Pakistan–China relations between 1951 and 2026. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on diplomatic processes, strategic interests, institutional arrangements, and interpretations of bilateral cooperation rather than on statistical.

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Theoretical Framework

Complex Interdependence Theory

Complex Interdependence Theory, developed by Keohane and Nye (1977), challenges the assumption that international relations are determined primarily by military power and relations between central governments. The theory emphasizes three major characteristics: multiple channels of interaction between societies, the absence of a consistent hierarchy among issues, and the limited utility of military force in resolving certain issues within relationships characterized by interdependence.

The first characteristic, multiple channels of interaction, refers to the connections between governments, private-sector organizations, businesses, universities, financial institutions, and other societal actors. The second suggests that international agendas include economic, environmental, technological, and social concerns alongside traditional security issues. The third indicates that military force may be less effective or appropriate when states are addressing problems involving trade, investment, environmental management, or economic cooperation (Keohane & Nye, 2012).This theory is particularly relevant to the contemporary development of Pakistan–China relations. Although defence and strategic cooperation remain important, bilateral engagement increasingly involves infrastructure development, energy, transportation, trade, investment, agriculture, information technology, and educational exchange. These interactions create multiple channels through which both countries pursue their interests and manage their relationship.

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), provides a significant example of economic interdependence. CPEC involves cooperation across transportation infrastructure, energy, industrial development, and regional connectivity. Its implementation requires coordination between government institutions, Chinese enterprises, Pakistani businesses, financial organizations, and local administrative authorities. Consequently, the success of bilateral economic cooperation depends not only on diplomatic relations but also on institutional capacity, commercial viability, and effective governance. Complex Interdependence Theory also draws attention to the unequal distribution of benefits and costs. Pakistan and China differ considerably in economic size, technological capabilities, financial resources, and industrial capacity. Although cooperation can generate mutual benefits, these structural differences may influence bargaining power, investment decisions, trade patterns, and the distribution of economic gains. Therefore, interdependence should not automatically be interpreted as equality or the absence of vulnerability.

For Pakistan, a central policy challenge is to transform infrastructure investment into export growth, employment, technology transfer, and stronger domestic productive capacity. For China, the long-term effectiveness of economic cooperation depends partly on Pakistan's economic stability, institutional performance, and ability to provide a secure and predictable environment for investment. Complex Interdependence Theory therefore helps explain why economic governance and domestic development have become increasingly important to the strategic partnership.

Diplomatic Evolution of Pakistan–China Relations (1951–2026)

The diplomatic evolution of Pakistan–China relations reflects the interaction of historical circumstances, national interests, regional security concerns, and changing international power structures. Since establishing diplomatic relations on 21 May 1951, Pakistan and China have progressively developed their relationship from formal diplomatic engagement into a multidimensional strategic partnership. The relationship has experienced several phases, including early diplomatic engagement, strategic rapprochement during the Cold War,

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institutional consolidation after China's economic reforms, and the expansion of economic cooperation through the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Its continuity demonstrates the importance of diplomatic consultation and converging interests in shaping bilateral relations. However, the relationship has also evolved in response to changing domestic priorities and regional geopolitical developments (Small, 2015).

Establishment of Diplomatic Relations and Early Engagement (1951–1962)

Pakistan and the People's Republic of China established diplomatic relations on 21 May 1951, creating the formal foundation for subsequent bilateral cooperation. During this period, both countries were consolidating their positions in the emerging post-Second World War international order. Pakistan's foreign policy increasingly emphasized external partnerships to address its security concerns, while China sought to strengthen its diplomatic position and develop relations with neighboring Asian states. Despite differences in their international alignments, diplomatic engagement gradually established channels for communication and cooperation. The early phase of the relationship illustrates that bilateral ties developed through pragmatic engagement rather than complete agreement on every international issue. Pakistan maintained close relations with Western powers, while China operated within a different geopolitical environment during the early Cold War. Nevertheless, the two states recognized the value of maintaining diplomatic contact. This early engagement provided an institutional basis for future cooperation in political, economic, and security affairs. The subsequent development of the relationship suggests that sustained diplomacy can create opportunities for cooperation even when states initially operate within different strategic frameworks (Small, 2015).

Strategic Rapprochement and Diplomatic Cooperation (1962–1971)

The Sino-Indian War of 1962 significantly influenced the strategic environment of South Asia and contributed to the expansion of Pakistan–China cooperation. Both countries increasingly recognized overlapping interests concerning regional security and their respective relations with India. The Sino-Pakistani boundary agreement of 1963 represented a major diplomatic development and helped establish a framework for bilateral cooperation on territorial matters, although the agreement remains connected to the wider dispute over Kashmir.

During this period, diplomatic engagement expanded alongside defence cooperation and political consultation. Pakistan and China developed closer relations within an international environment characterized by strategic competition and shifting alliances. From a realist perspective, this rapprochement can be interpreted as an example of states strengthening bilateral ties when they perceive overlapping security interests. However, strategic considerations alone do not explain the entire relationship; diplomatic trust and institutional engagement also contributed to its consolidation. Small (2015) argues that the historical development of the relationship must be understood within the wider context of Asian geopolitics and the evolving strategic interests of both countries.

Pakistan's Diplomatic Role in Sino-American Rapprochement (1971–1978)

One of the most consequential episodes in Pakistan–China diplomatic relations was Pakistan's role in facilitating communication between China and the United States in 1971. At a time when Washington and Beijing lacked normal diplomatic relations, Pakistan provided an important channel for confidential diplomatic contact. This initiative contributed to the preparations for U.S. National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing in July

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1971 and President Richard Nixon's visit to China in February 1972.

Pakistan's intermediary role demonstrated its ability to use diplomatic relationships to facilitate communication between major powers. The episode also strengthened Pakistan's diplomatic significance within the changing international system. It illustrates how a regional state can contribute to broader geopolitical developments through mediation and confidential diplomacy. More generally, the experience highlights the importance of diplomatic flexibility, political trust, and the strategic use of bilateral relationships in international affairs (Small, 2015).

Institutional Consolidation and Economic Diplomacy (1978–2000)

The period from 1978 to 2000 witnessed the gradual consolidation of Pakistan–China relations alongside China's economic reforms and the transformation of the international political system. China's economic modernization increased its engagement with international markets, while Pakistan continued to regard China as an important partner in its regional and security policies. Bilateral cooperation expanded through diplomatic exchanges, defence collaboration, technological cooperation, and infrastructure development. An important symbol of this relationship was the Karakoram Highway, which strengthened physical connectivity between Pakistan and China through the mountainous region of Gilgit-Baltistan. The highway represented more than a transportation project; it also reflected the importance of geographical connectivity in facilitating diplomatic and economic relations. Nevertheless, the broader economic potential of bilateral cooperation remained constrained by differences in productive capacity, infrastructure requirements, and the changing priorities of both countries.

The end of the Cold War in 1991 introduced a new international environment characterized by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a different distribution of global power. Pakistan and China continued to maintain diplomatic engagement despite these changes. Their relationship demonstrated a degree of continuity because it was supported by long-term strategic interests rather than dependence on a single international alliance. From the perspective of international relations, this period illustrates how bilateral partnerships can adapt to systemic changes while retaining their central diplomatic objectives (Small, 2015).

Post-9/11 Diplomacy and Expanding Strategic Cooperation (2001–2012)

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent international campaign against terrorism reshaped the strategic environment in South Asia. Pakistan became a central participant in international counterterrorism efforts, while China continued to develop its economic and diplomatic engagement with countries across Asia. These developments created new requirements for regional diplomatic coordination and security cooperation. During this period, Pakistan and China expanded their engagement in trade, infrastructure, energy, defence, and high-level political dialogue. The relationship increasingly reflected a combination of traditional security interests and emerging economic priorities. For Pakistan, cooperation with China provided opportunities for infrastructure development and economic engagement; for China, stable relations with Pakistan supported its wider interests in regional connectivity and security.

This phase also illustrates the importance of diplomatic adaptation. Both countries had to respond to changing international conditions, including the evolving policies of the United States, regional instability, and transformations in the global economy. Their continuing engagement reflected overlapping interests, although the two states maintained distinct foreign-policy priorities. Small (2015) provides a useful account of the historical and geopolitical factors that shaped the relationship during these broader international transformations.

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The Launch of CPEC and the Expansion of Economic Diplomacy (2013–2017)

The launch of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor in 2013 marked a major development in the diplomatic and economic relationship. CPEC became a flagship component of China's Belt and Road Initiative and provided a framework for cooperation in transport infrastructure, energy, logistics, and industrial development. The Long Term Plan for China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (2017–2030) subsequently outlined a broad framework for cooperation across multiple sectors (Government of Pakistan & National Development and Reform Commission of China, 2017). CPEC expanded the scope of bilateral diplomacy by making economic planning and project implementation increasingly important elements of government-to-government engagement. Diplomatic consultations were no longer concerned exclusively with traditional security and political questions; they also involved investment facilitation, financing arrangements, infrastructure development, and institutional coordination.

However, the expansion of economic diplomacy introduced additional responsibilities. Both governments needed to address project implementation, financing sustainability, security arrangements, and the relationship between infrastructure investment and domestic economic development. These issues demonstrate that economic cooperation requires effective diplomatic management throughout the project cycle, from planning and negotiation to implementation and evaluation. From the perspective of Complex Interdependence Theory, CPEC illustrates the growing connections between economic development, political relations, infrastructure, and security. Keohane and Nye (1977) argue that international relationships operate through multiple channels and that economic and political issues frequently interact. In the Pakistan–China context, this perspective helps explain why the management of economic projects has become inseparable from broader bilateral diplomacy.

Strategic Partnership and Institutional Management (2018–2024)

Between 2018 and 2024, Pakistan–China relations continued to emphasize strategic coordination and the implementation of CPEC-related initiatives. Both countries maintained diplomatic engagement while addressing economic pressures, infrastructure requirements, and security challenges. The relationship increasingly required coordination among political leadership, foreign ministries, economic institutions, and agencies responsible for implementing bilateral agreements. The institutional dimension became particularly important as the two governments sought to move beyond the initial construction of infrastructure toward greater industrial cooperation and productive economic activity. The CPEC Long Term Plan provided a framework for cooperation in transport, energy, industrial parks, agriculture, and other sectors (Government of Pakistan & National Development and Reform Commission of China, 2017).

Nevertheless, the implementation of economic cooperation remained subject to domestic and international constraints. Pakistan's financial pressures and administrative challenges affected the environment in which projects were planned and executed. Security incidents involving Chinese nationals and projects also underscored the importance of protecting personnel and maintaining operational confidence. These developments demonstrate that a strategic partnership requires more than political agreement. It also requires institutional capacity, realistic planning, effective risk management, and the ability to resolve implementation difficulties through diplomatic consultation. Strategic management therefore provides an important analytical perspective for understanding the evolution of bilateral relations during this period.

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The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary and the Next Phase of Relations (2025–2026)

The seventy-fifth anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2026 represented an important milestone in Pakistan–China relations. The two governments used the occasion to reaffirm their commitment to political trust, strategic cooperation, and expanded engagement across economic and security sectors. On 21 May 2026, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari exchanged congratulatory messages marking the anniversary and emphasizing the continuation of bilateral cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026).

The joint statement issued during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to China in May 2026 also emphasized the implementation of the 2025–2029 Action Plan, the advancement of CPEC cooperation, and collaboration in agriculture, technology, security, and regional connectivity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2026). These commitments indicate that the contemporary relationship is increasingly concerned with connecting diplomatic objectives to economic and institutional outcomes. The emerging phase of cooperation places greater emphasis on industrial development, agricultural modernization, technological collaboration, and business-to-business engagement. These priorities create opportunities to strengthen Pakistan's productive capacity and broaden the economic foundations of bilateral relations. However, their success will depend on the commercial viability of projects, effective implementation, local participation, and the ability to manage financial and security risks.

Strategic Management of Pakistan–China Relations

Strategic management is a central dimension of contemporary Pakistan–China relations because it connects long-term diplomatic objectives with the practical implementation of bilateral cooperation. Over seventy-five years, the relationship has expanded beyond traditional political and security engagement to include economic development, infrastructure, trade, technology, agriculture, and regional connectivity. This diversification has increased the need for effective institutional coordination, policy planning, resource allocation, and risk management. As Pakistan and China move into the next phase of their strategic partnership, the effectiveness of bilateral cooperation will depend not only on political trust but also on the capacity of both governments to convert shared priorities into measurable outcomes. In this study, strategic management refers to the processes through which governments formulate objectives, coordinate institutions, allocate resources, implement policies, monitor performance, and respond to emerging challenges. In the context of international relations, these processes help explain how states maintain long-term partnerships while adapting to changing domestic and international conditions. Nag et al. (2007) identify strategic management as a field concerned with the major intended and emergent initiatives undertaken by general managers on behalf of owners, involving the utilization of resources to enhance organizational performance in external environments. Although this definition originates in management scholarship, its emphasis on resource allocation, strategic initiatives, and performance provides a useful analytical basis for examining bilateral cooperation.

Pakistan–China strategic management involves several interconnected dimensions, including high-level diplomatic consultation, defence and security coordination, CPEC implementation, economic and financial cooperation, and engagement in regional and international institutions. These dimensions are mutually reinforcing but also present different policy requirements. For example, infrastructure development depends on financing and administrative capacity, while security cooperation requires intelligence coordination, risk assessment, and effective protection measures.

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Similarly, the expansion of trade requires attention to market access, export competitiveness, and the participation of domestic businesses. The bilateral relationship therefore provides an important case for examining how strategic interests are translated into institutional arrangements and development outcomes. The 2025–2029 Action Plan and the joint statement issued during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to China in May 2026 reaffirmed the importance of strategic coordination and cooperation across multiple sectors (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2026). These commitments provide a policy framework, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on implementation, monitoring, and the ability to respond to changing circumstances.

Strategic Planning and Diplomatic Coordination

Strategic planning establishes the priorities that guide bilateral relations over an extended period. In Pakistan–China relations, diplomatic consultation helps identify shared objectives, coordinate foreign-policy positions, and manage emerging disagreements. Regular high-level meetings and institutional dialogues also provide opportunities to review bilateral commitments and adjust policies in response to regional and international developments. The strategic importance of diplomatic coordination can be understood through Realism, which emphasizes the role of national interests, security, and power in international politics. Waltz (1979) argues that the structure of the international system influences state behavior and the choices available to governments. From this perspective, Pakistan–China cooperation reflects overlapping strategic interests and efforts to manage an evolving regional environment. Nevertheless, effective strategic planning requires recognition that the two countries do not have identical economic circumstances, international priorities, or institutional capacities. Their shared interests create opportunities for cooperation, but individual policies must still reflect each country's national requirements. Consequently, diplomatic coordination should not be interpreted as the complete alignment of every foreign-policy position.

A practical strategic planning framework should include clearly defined priorities, designated implementing institutions, realistic timelines, and periodic reviews. It should also distinguish between political commitments, approved projects, projects under implementation, and completed initiatives. Such distinctions would improve accountability and provide a more reliable basis for evaluating progress.

Strategic Management of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor

CPEC represents one of the most important areas in which strategic management influences Pakistan–China relations. Established within the broader framework of China's Belt and Road Initiative, the corridor encompasses transport infrastructure, energy cooperation, Gwadar Port, industrial development, and regional connectivity. The Long Term Plan for China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (2017–2030) provides a framework for cooperation across these sectors (Government of Pakistan & National Development and Reform Commission of China, 2017).

From a strategic management perspective, CPEC requires coordination between diplomatic objectives and economic implementation. Large infrastructure projects involve financing arrangements, construction schedules, regulatory approvals, technical expertise, security provisions, and assessments of economic feasibility. Weaknesses in any of these areas can delay implementation or reduce the expected benefits. A major management challenge is ensuring that infrastructure investment contributes to long-term productive development. Roads, power plants, and transport facilities can support economic growth, but their impact depends on the development of industries, export markets, skilled

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Labour, and local supply chains. Accordingly, the next phase of CPEC should be evaluated not only through the volume of investment but also through employment generation, industrial productivity, export growth, and local business participation. Strategic management also requires a distinction between planned and realized outcomes. Government announcements establish policy intentions, but project completion, commercial operation, and economic returns must be assessed independently. Transparent progress reports and project-level evaluations would enable both countries to identify implementation difficulties and make evidence-based adjustments.

Economic Management and Financial Sustainability

Economic management is another essential component of bilateral cooperation. Pakistan seeks to attract investment, improve infrastructure, expand exports, and strengthen domestic productive capacity. China, meanwhile, has commercial, economic, and strategic interests in overseas cooperation. Maintaining mutually beneficial relations requires both sides to consider the financial viability of projects and the broader economic circumstances in which they operate.

One important challenge concerns the financial structure of infrastructure and investment projects. Loans, grants, equity investments, and public-private partnerships have different implications for public finances and commercial risk. Therefore, assessments of Chinese economic engagement should distinguish between these financing arrangements rather than treating every investment as a debt obligation.

Pakistan should strengthen project appraisal, financial disclosure, procurement procedures, and independent evaluation. Each major project should be assessed in terms of its expected economic returns, financing costs, repayment obligations where applicable, employment potential, and contribution to productive capacity. These measures would help reduce implementation risks and improve confidence among public institutions, businesses, and investors. Economic cooperation should also prioritize diversification. Greater collaboration in agricultural processing, manufacturing, information technology, renewable energy, and export-oriented industries could broaden the economic foundations of the relationship. Complex Interdependence Theory is particularly relevant here because it emphasizes the multiple channels through which states interact and the importance of economic and institutional relationships alongside traditional security concerns (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

Security Management and Risk Assessment

Security management is a significant component of Pakistan–China relations because threats to Chinese nationals, infrastructure, and development projects can affect operational continuity and investor confidence. Protecting personnel and infrastructure requires coordination among relevant government institutions, intelligence agencies, law-enforcement bodies, and project authorities.An effective security framework should combine preventive measures, intelligence sharing, professional risk assessments, emergency response planning, and lawful investigation of attacks. Security arrangements should be reviewed regularly to account for changes in local conditions and project-specific risks.

However, security management should not be confined to physical protection. Engagement with communities affected by development projects can help authorities understand local concerns relating to employment, livelihoods, environmental impacts, and access to economic opportunities. Community consultation cannot eliminate terrorism or other security threats, but it can improve communication and help identify grievances that require legitimate policy responses. Strategic management in this area should balance the protection of Chinese personnel and infrastructure with the rights and welfare of

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Pakistani citizens. Transparent procedures, clear institutional responsibilities, and accountability for security operations are important elements of a sustainable approach.

Institutional Coordination and Governance

Institutional coordination determines how effectively bilateral agreements are translated into action. Pakistan–China cooperation involves multiple government departments, regulatory institutions, economic agencies, provincial authorities, and project-specific organizations. Their activities must be coordinated to reduce administrative delays and avoid conflicting policy decisions. The strategic management literature emphasizes the importance of aligning organizational objectives, resources, and implementation processes. Bryson (2018) demonstrates the relevance of strategic planning to public and nonprofit organizations, particularly where multiple stakeholders and institutional constraints shape policy outcomes.

Applied to Pakistan–China relations, this perspective suggests that bilateral cooperation should be supported by clearly assigned responsibilities, regular interagency consultation, transparent monitoring systems, and effective mechanisms for resolving implementation disputes. Provincial and local authorities should be involved where projects affect land use, environmental management, employment, or public services.A further priority is institutional continuity. Bilateral projects often extend across multiple budget cycles and political administrations. Their implementation should therefore depend on established procedures, documented commitments, and measurable objectives rather than relying exclusively on high-level political announcements.

Strategic Management of Regional Geopolitical Risks

Pakistan–China relations are influenced by the broader geopolitical environment, including India–China competition, Pakistan–India tensions, developments in Afghanistan, and changing relations among major powers. These factors can affect diplomatic calculations, security requirements, investment decisions, and regional connectivity. Strategic management requires both countries to assess these developments without assuming that their interests are identical in every situation. Pakistan must manage its economic and security relationships while pursuing national development objectives. China must also consider its wider diplomatic and commercial relationships across Asia and beyond.

A flexible approach to diplomacy can help both countries maintain bilateral cooperation while responding to regional uncertainty. Regular consultation, crisis communication, and engagement through multilateral institutions can reduce misunderstandings and support the peaceful management of disputes.From a strategic perspective, bilateral cooperation should not be understood exclusively as a response to a third country. Its sustainability also depends on its contribution to economic development, trade, infrastructure, technological cooperation, and the welfare of both populations.

Strategic Management, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Sustainable Development

Gilgit-Baltistan occupies an important geographical position in Pakistan–China connectivity because of the Karakoram Highway and the Khunjerab Pass. The region offers potential opportunities for tourism, agricultural trade, logistics, and small-business development. However, its mountainous terrain, environmental sensitivity, and exposure to floods, landslides, earthquakes, and other hazards create substantial infrastructure and development challenges.

Strategic management in this context should connect national connectivity objectives with local socioeconomic priorities. Infrastructure projects should be evaluated not only in terms of transportation and transit but also in terms of their contribution to employment, local enterprise development, public services, and environmental

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resilience.Priority areas include climate-resilient transport infrastructure, vocational training, improved digital connectivity, sustainable tourism, agricultural value chains, and meaningful consultation with affected communities. Local universities and research institutions could also contribute to evidence-based planning through research on mountain ecology, climate adaptation, disaster management, and regional economic development. A locally responsive approach would help ensure that the strategic significance of Gilgit-Baltistan is accompanied by practical development opportunities for its population. Environmental and social assessments should be integrated into project planning and monitoring rather than treated as secondary considerations.

Performance Evaluation and Strategic Accountability

The effectiveness of strategic management should be assessed through measurable indicators rather than diplomatic declarations alone. A systematic evaluation framework could examine the following dimensions:

Challenges to Effective Strategic Management

Despite the institutional foundations of Pakistan–China relations, several challenges may affect the effective management of bilateral cooperation. First, differences in economic capacity and administrative resources can complicate project planning and implementation. Second, financial constraints may limit Pakistan's ability to support infrastructure and development initiatives without careful prioritization. Third, security threats can increase operating costs and disrupt project schedules. Fourth, coordination among federal, provincial, and local institutions may affect implementation where projects require multiple approvals. Finally, environmental vulnerabilities and changing geopolitical conditions create additional requirements for long-term planning.

These challenges are interconnected and cannot be addressed through diplomatic engagement alone. They require a coordinated approach involving economic planning, institutional reform, security cooperation, environmental assessment, and public accountability. The 2026 bilateral joint statement provides a contemporary policy basis for examining these priorities, particularly its emphasis on strategic coordination, security, and the continued development of CPEC (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2026).

An effective strategic management framework should therefore combine long-term planning with regular evaluation, transparent decision-making, and the capacity to revise policies when conditions change. Such an approach would help both countries preserve the continuity of their partnership while ensuring that bilateral cooperation remains economically sustainable and responsive to public needs.

Strategic management has become increasingly important in Pakistan–China relations as the partnership has expanded from traditional diplomacy and defence cooperation to infrastructure, trade, industrial development, technology, and regional connectivity. The relationship's seventy-five-year history demonstrates the significance of political trust and overlapping national interests, but the implementation of contemporary cooperation requires effective institutions and clearly defined development priorities. The CPEC illustrates both the opportunities and the management challenges associated with this partnership. Its contribution to economic development will depend on project viability, financial sustainability, export diversification, security, and the integration of infrastructure with productive economic activity. Similarly, regional connectivity initiatives should incorporate local development priorities, particularly in environmentally vulnerable regions such as Gilgit-Baltistan. strategic management should be understood as a continuous process involving planning, coordination, implementation, monitoring, and adaptation. By strengthening institutional capacity, improving transparency, diversifying economic cooperation,

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protecting personnel and infrastructure, and incorporating environmental and social considerations, Pakistan and China can improve the practical effectiveness of their bilateral partnership. Ultimately, the long-term sustainability of Pakistan–China relations will depend on the extent to which strategic cooperation generates measurable, mutually beneficial, and inclusive outcomes.

Emerging Challenges in Pakistan–China Relations at 75

As Pakistan and China mark 75 years of diplomatic relations in 2026, their bilateral partnership faces a changing regional and international environment. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1951, cooperation has expanded from diplomatic engagement and defence collaboration to economic connectivity, infrastructure development, energy, technology, and multilateral diplomacy. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), launched as a major component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has further broadened the relationship by connecting strategic cooperation with Pakistan's economic development ambitions (Government of Pakistan & National Development and Reform Commission of China, 2017; Small, 2015).

Nevertheless, the durability of bilateral relations depends not only on diplomatic goodwill but also on how both countries manage security threats, economic constraints, project implementation, regional rivalries, and public expectations. Pakistan faces domestic economic and governance challenges, while China's regional and global interests are influenced by strategic competition, trade routes, and its wider economic partnerships. These conditions create both opportunities and policy difficulties for the relationship. The emerging challenges should therefore be understood not as evidence of a breakdown in Pakistan–China relations, but as issues requiring sustained diplomatic coordination, institutional reform, transparent economic planning, and effective risk management. This section examines eight major challenges affecting the future trajectory of the partnership.

Security Threats and the Protection of Chinese Nationals

Security remains one of the most significant challenges facing Pakistan–China relations. Chinese engineers, technical experts, and other personnel work on infrastructure, energy, and development projects across Pakistan. Attacks against Chinese nationals and projects have raised concerns about the security environment and the continuity of bilateral cooperation.

In January 2026, Pakistan announced the creation of a specialized police unit to protect Chinese nationals in Islamabad, alongside measures involving police training and rapid information-sharing. These steps reflect efforts to strengthen security cooperation, but they also demonstrate the continuing difficulties of protecting foreign personnel and strategically important projects. The challenge extends beyond physical protection. Security incidents can delay projects, increase insurance and operational costs, affect investor confidence, and create diplomatic pressure. Effective responses require intelligence coordination, professional policing, rapid emergency response, and cooperation between federal and provincial authorities. Pakistan should strengthen intelligence-sharing mechanisms, improve security coordination among law-enforcement agencies, and ensure that protection arrangements are accompanied by community engagement and local development. China and Pakistan should also establish transparent procedures for assessing security risks and reviewing the effectiveness of protective measures.

Economic Sustainability, Debt Management, and Investment

Economic cooperation is a central pillar of the bilateral relationship, particularly through CPEC. Infrastructure, electricity generation, transport connectivity, and port development have

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expanded the scope of cooperation. However, the long-term value of these investments depends on Pakistan's ability to generate economic activity, increase exports, create employment, and maintain fiscal sustainability.

Pakistan's economic difficulties—including external financing requirements, debt-servicing pressures, limited export diversification, and constraints on public investment—affect the implementation of large infrastructure projects. The International Monetary Fund's 2026 review of Pakistan's economic programme provides evidence of the continuing importance of fiscal management, external financing, and structural reforms. These challenges should not be interpreted as evidence that all Chinese investment is unsustainable. CPEC includes different types of projects and financing arrangements, and their economic effects must be assessed individually. The central policy question is whether projects generate sufficient productivity, employment, trade, and public revenue to justify their financial and operational costs.

Pakistan also needs to move beyond an investment model focused predominantly on infrastructure construction. Roads, power plants, and ports can facilitate development, but they do not automatically create competitive industries or export growth. Industrial development, agricultural processing, technology transfer, and small- and medium-sized enterprises require complementary policies. Both countries should priorities commercially viable projects, publish clearer information about project costs and expected benefits, improve the evaluation of public liabilities, and promote export-oriented investment. Economic cooperation should support productive capacity rather than relying excessively on repeated financing arrangements.

CPEC Implementation and Governance Challenges

The transition from CPEC's initial infrastructure emphasis to a broader phase of industrial development, innovation, green growth, and employment presents another challenge. In May 2026, Pakistan and China reaffirmed their commitment to advancing CPEC 2.0, improving connectivity, developing Gwadar Port, and strengthening the use of the Khunjerab Pass for cross-border connectivity. The joint statement also welcomed third-party participation under an agreed framework. Despite these commitments, implementation depends on administrative capacity, policy continuity, timely financing, land acquisition, coordination among institutions, and effective monitoring. Delays can weaken confidence among investors and local communities. Unclear responsibilities between federal and provincial bodies may also complicate implementation. Governance is therefore as important as diplomatic commitment. Large projects require transparent procurement, credible feasibility studies, independent evaluation, and accessible information about project progress. Where communities experience limited employment opportunities or insufficient consultation, public expectations may diverge from the benefits actually delivered.

The official CPEC Secretariat's August 2026 account of CPEC 2.0 described an expanded agenda involving institution-building, human resources, innovation, green development, and youth exchanges. This broader approach creates an opportunity to evaluate cooperation by its developmental outcomes rather than only by the scale of infrastructure investment. Policy implications: Pakistan should establish measurable project milestones, strengthen intergovernmental coordination, publish periodic progress reports, and use independent assessments to evaluate economic and social outcomes. Chinese and Pakistani institutions should also ensure that project selection reflects local needs and national development priorities.

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Regional Geopolitical Competition and Strategic Balancing

Pakistan–China relations operate within a complex regional and international environment. China's strategic competition with the United States, Pakistan's security concerns regarding India, and the evolving relationships among Afghanistan, Iran, the Gulf States, and major powers all influence the diplomatic context. The relationship with China is a major component of Pakistan's foreign policy, but Pakistan also has economic, diplomatic, and security interests involving other international partners. In January 2026, Reuters reported renewed emphasis on Pakistan–China cooperation alongside signs of closer engagement between Islamabad and Washington. Such developments illustrate the challenge of maintaining constructive relationships with multiple powers whose interests may differ. Pakistan's engagement with the United States does not automatically conflict with its partnership with China. However, tensions could emerge if cooperation in trade, technology, defence, or regional security becomes entangled in wider strategic competition.

Afghanistan, Cross-Border Security, and Regional Connectivity

Afghanistan's security environment is relevant to Pakistan–China relations because instability can affect border management, regional trade, infrastructure security, and counterterrorism cooperation. Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan have also influenced the wider regional context in which China seeks connectivity and economic cooperation. For China, the security of its personnel and investments in Pakistan is connected to the broader stability of the region. For Pakistan, cross-border militancy, border tensions, and the difficulties of establishing predictable regional trade conditions create significant security and economic concerns. Regional connectivity projects cannot achieve their full potential through physical infrastructure alone. They also depend on secure transport corridors, reliable customs procedures, predictable border arrangements, and diplomatic cooperation among neighboring states. Without these conditions, the anticipated economic benefits of regional integration may remain limited. Pakistan and China should coordinate on regional security and connectivity while supporting diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan and other neighboring states. Practical cooperation on border management, trade facilitation, information-sharing, and regional economic initiatives may help reduce risks without making connectivity entirely dependent on the resolution of wider political disputes.

Challenges in Gilgit-Baltistan and the Northern Corridor

Gilgit-Baltistan occupies an important geographical position in Pakistan's overland connectivity with China through the Karakoram Highway and the Khunjerab Pass. Its mountainous terrain, climate-related hazards, transport vulnerabilities, and dependence on key road links create particular challenges for the long-term sustainability of cross-border connectivity.

The 2026 Pakistan–China joint statement included an agreement to advance the phased realignment of the Karakoram Highway between Thakot and Raikot and to strengthen connectivity through Khunjerab Pass. However, connectivity projects in mountainous regions require more than road construction. Landslides, floods, earthquakes, glacial hazards, extreme weather, and road closures can interrupt transport and affect local livelihoods. Infrastructure planning must therefore account for climate resilience, environmental protection, disaster preparedness, and the needs of communities living along transport routes.

Gilgit-Baltistan also raises questions of equitable development. Local communities need opportunities to participate in employment, business, tourism, skills development, and decision-making. If regional connectivity produces limited benefits for nearby populations, public

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support for development projects may be weakened. A sustainable approach should integrate transport infrastructure with local economic development. This includes supporting small businesses, strengthening tourism and agricultural value chains, investing in technical education, and involving local institutions in environmental and disaster-risk assessments. Pakistan and China should incorporate climate-risk assessments into northern corridor planning, improve disaster-resilient infrastructure, support local employment and skills training, and consult affected communities. Development in Gilgit-Baltistan should be assessed not only by improvements in connectivity but also by its social, environmental, and economic effects.

Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change

Environmental sustainability is increasingly relevant to the future of Pakistan–China cooperation. Major transport corridors, energy facilities, industrial zones, and port developments may affect land use, water resources, biodiversity, air quality, and local ecosystems. The nature and scale of these effects vary by project and must be established through evidence-based assessment rather than assumed in advance. Climate change creates additional concerns for Pakistan, including extreme rainfall, flooding, heat stress, and hazards affecting mountain environments. In Gilgit-Baltistan, climate-sensitive transport infrastructure is particularly important because disruption to major roads can isolate communities and interrupt supply chains.

The next phase of CPEC provides an opportunity to integrate environmental safeguards with economic development. Pakistan and China have identified green development as part of the wider cooperation agenda described in the official CPEC 2.0 announcement. Nevertheless, environmental commitments require implementation. Environmental impact assessments, transparent monitoring, responsible water management, biodiversity protection, and public consultation should be built into project planning from the beginning. Green investment should also be evaluated according to measurable outcomes, including emissions, energy efficiency, ecosystem protection, and resilience to climate hazards. The two countries should promote renewable energy where technically and economically suitable, strengthen environmental compliance, expand climate-resilient infrastructure, and support joint research on mountain hazards, water security, and ecosystem conservation.

Public Perceptions, Employment, and People-to-People Relations

The long-term strength of Pakistan–China relations depends not only on government agreements but also on public perceptions and social outcomes. Diplomatic cooperation is more sustainable when citizens can identify tangible benefits, including employment, education, technology transfer, improved services, and business opportunities. Expectations surrounding CPEC have been substantial. If project implementation is delayed or benefits are perceived to be concentrated among particular sectors or regions, public confidence may be affected. This does not mean that public opinion is uniformly negative; rather, perceptions can differ across communities according to their experiences and expectations. People-to-people relations can help address information gaps and encourage more informed discussion. Academic exchanges, language programmes, research partnerships, vocational training, and collaboration among universities can create practical connections beyond official diplomacy. The broader CPEC 2.0 agenda, as described by Pakistan's CPEC Secretariat in August 2026, includes human-resource development, knowledge exchange, and youth engagement. These priorities could help strengthen the social foundations of the relationship if they are supported by accessible and sustained programmes. Pakistan and China should expand

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university partnerships, scholarships, technical training, cultural exchanges, and joint research. They should also improve communication about project costs, benefits, employment opportunities, and implementation challenges. Transparent information can help distinguish verified outcomes from political claims or unrealistic expectations.

Conclusion

The 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China in 2026 represents an important milestone in the historical evolution of their bilateral partnership. Since establishing diplomatic relations in 1951, the two countries have expanded their engagement across diplomacy, defence, economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and regional affairs. Over the decades, their relationship has adapted to changing international circumstances, including the Cold War, the transformation of the global political economy, post-9/11 security dynamics, and contemporary strategic competition among major powers. This historical continuity demonstrates the significance both countries attach to maintaining their partnership while pursuing their respective national interests.

The evolution of Pakistan–China relations also reflects the changing nature of bilateral cooperation. While strategic and security considerations have remained important, economic development and regional connectivity have acquired greater prominence, particularly through the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a major component of China's Belt and Road Initiative. CPEC has created opportunities for infrastructure development, energy cooperation, transport connectivity, and industrial investment. Nevertheless, the extent to which these opportunities contribute to Pakistan's long-term development depends on effective implementation, economic viability, institutional capacity, and the distribution of benefits across sectors and regions.This study argues that the future of Pakistan–China relations cannot be understood exclusively through the traditional framework of strategic partnership. Although geopolitical considerations continue to influence bilateral cooperation, economic interdependence, institutional coordination, and development outcomes are increasingly important for sustaining the relationship. The application of Realism helps explain the strategic and security dimensions of bilateral engagement, while Complex Interdependence Theory highlights the growing importance of economic, institutional, and societal connections. Together, these perspectives provide a broader understanding of the opportunities and constraints shaping the partnership.

Despite its historical significance, Pakistan–China cooperation faces several emerging challenges. Security threats to Chinese nationals and development projects, Pakistan's fiscal constraints, delays in project implementation, governance limitations, regional instability, and intensifying major-power competition require sustained attention. Environmental degradation and climate-related hazards also present important concerns, particularly for infrastructure and communities in mountainous regions. These challenges do not necessarily undermine the bilateral relationship; rather, they demonstrate the need for more effective strategic management, evidence-based policymaking, and institutional accountability. The transition towards CPEC 2.0 provides an opportunity to broaden cooperation beyond infrastructure construction and strengthen industrial development, technological innovation, agricultural modernization, human-resource development, and green growth. However, these objectives require practical measures, including transparent project evaluation, export-oriented investment, skills development, environmental safeguards, and regular monitoring of economic and social outcomes. Pakistan should also strengthen its institutional capacity to ensure that bilateral cooperation complements national development

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priorities and contributes to long-term economic resilience.

Particular attention should be given to Gilgit-Baltistan because of its geographical importance to the Karakoram Highway and the Khunjerab connectivity corridor. The region's mountainous environment, exposure to climate-related hazards, and dependence on transport links make climate-resilient infrastructure and disaster-risk reduction essential. At the same time, local communities should have meaningful opportunities to participate in development planning and benefit through employment, education, tourism, and business opportunities. A sustainable approach to regional connectivity must therefore integrate strategic objectives with environmental protection and inclusive local development. Furthermore, Pakistan's foreign policy should preserve its close relationship with China while maintaining constructive engagement with other international partners. A diversified approach to diplomacy, trade, and investment would provide greater flexibility in responding to global economic and geopolitical changes. Cooperation with China can remain an important element of Pakistan's external relations without excluding mutually beneficial engagement with other countries. This approach would help Pakistan manage external pressures while focusing on economic stability, regional peace, and national development.

Pakistan–China relations at 75 reflect both historical continuity and the need for strategic adaptation. The strength of the partnership in the coming decades will depend not only on diplomatic commitments and strategic alignment but also on the capacity of both countries to manage security risks, improve economic governance, promote technological cooperation, protect the environment, and deliver tangible benefits to their populations. Future research should examine these developments through empirical assessments of CPEC implementation, bilateral trade, local employment, public perceptions, and environmental outcomes. Ultimately, the future of Pakistan–China relations will depend on transforming longstanding diplomatic goodwill into sustainable economic progress, effective institutional cooperation, regional stability, and inclusive development. The 75th anniversary should therefore be understood not merely as a celebration of past achievements but as an opportunity to establish a more productive, transparent, resilient, and people-Centred partnership for the next phase of bilateral relations.

Recommendations

Strengthening Strategic and Diplomatic Coordination

Pakistan and China should institutionalize regular high-level consultations to review bilateral commitments, regional developments, and emerging security and economic challenges. Diplomatic coordination should extend beyond summit-level meetings to include specialized working groups involving foreign affairs, finance, and trade, defence, and development institutions. A structured review mechanism would help both countries identify implementation gaps and respond to changing geopolitical conditions.

Improving Security Cooperation

Both countries should strengthen intelligence-sharing, counterterrorism coordination, and protective arrangements for Chinese nationals and development projects in Pakistan. Security planning should include risk assessments, emergency response protocols, and coordination between federal and provincial authorities. Community engagement and local development should complement security measures to promote a safer environment for international cooperation.

Ensuring the Economic Sustainability of CPEC

Pakistan and China should priorities projects that demonstrate economic viability, employment potential, export capacity, and long-term developmental benefits. Project selection should be based on transparent feasibility studies and realistic assessments of financing requirements.

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Pakistan should strengthen fiscal management and ensure that infrastructure investments contribute to productive economic activity rather than creating unsustainable financial obligations.

Promoting Industrialization and Export Diversification

Bilateral cooperation should move beyond infrastructure development towards industrial production, agricultural modernisation, information technology, and value-added manufacturing. Special economic zones should encourage technology transfer, skills development, and participation by Pakistani enterprises. Export-oriented cooperation can help Pakistan improve its trade capacity and obtain broader benefits from its partnership with China.

Strengthening CPEC Governance and Institutional Accountability

The governments should establish clear performance indicators, implementation timelines, and institutional responsibilities for major CPEC projects. Periodic progress reports and independent evaluations should assess project completion, employment generation, financial sustainability, and local economic benefits. Transparent procurement and effective coordination among government agencies would improve public confidence and reduce administrative delays.

Maintaining Balanced Foreign Relations

Pakistan should pursue a foreign policy that preserves its strategic partnership with China while maintaining constructive relations with other major powers, including the United States, and regional partners. Diversifying trade, investment, and diplomatic engagement can expand Pakistan's policy options. Such an approach should be based on national interests, economic resilience, and pragmatic engagement rather than unnecessary confrontation between competing powers.

Strengthening Regional Connectivity and Cooperation

Pakistan and China should promote regional connectivity through improved transport infrastructure, customs facilitation, and diplomatic engagement with neighbouring countries. Cooperation concerning Afghanistan and Central Asia should focus on trade, border management, counterterrorism, and economic integration. Progress in regional connectivity will require attention to security risks and the political conditions affecting cross-border movement.

Promoting Sustainable Development in Gilgit-Baltistan

Development along the Karakoram Highway and the Khunjerab corridor should incorporate the needs of local communities in Gilgit-Baltistan. Infrastructure planning should consider climate-related hazards, landslides, floods, earthquakes, biodiversity, and water resources. Local employment, vocational training, tourism, agricultural value chains, and consultation with affected communities should be integral components of development planning.

Enhancing Environmental and Climate Cooperation

Pakistan and China should expand cooperation on renewable energy, climate adaptation, disaster-risk reduction, and environmental monitoring. Environmental impact assessments should be conducted transparently before major projects begin, followed by monitoring during implementation. Joint research on glacial hazards, mountain ecosystems, water security, and climate-resilient infrastructure would be particularly relevant to northern Pakistan.

Expanding Educational and People-to-People Exchanges

Both countries should increase university partnerships, scholarships, student exchanges, technical training, and joint research programmes. Cooperation should include social sciences,

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international relations, environmental studies, engineering, public policy, and emerging technologies. Greater access to language education and professional training would help strengthen mutual understanding and develop the skills required for future cooperation.

Supporting Science, Technology, and Digital Cooperation

Pakistan and China should expand cooperation in digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, information technology, scientific research, and innovation. Technology partnerships should include skills transfer, research collaboration, cybersecurity safeguards, and opportunities for Pakistani firms and universities. Clear regulatory frameworks can help ensure that technological cooperation supports domestic capacity-building and responsible innovation.

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