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Pakistan-China Strategic Partnership and Its Impact on Regional Stability

Muhammad Arif (Phd)

Postdoc Faculty, School of History and Culture, Southwest University

Email: arifedu8@swu.edu.cn

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Corresponding

Author:

arifedu8@swu.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

The Pakistan-China strategic partnership has transformed to become one of the most sustainable and high-dimensional bilateral relations in the modern international politics. This joint venture is based on mutual security issues, economic interconnectedness and overlapping geopolitical interests and is therefore a decisive factor in the stabilization of the region in South Asia, Central Asia and the Indo-Pacific. The cooperation is in the areas of defense cooperation, counterterrorism, nuclear and technological assistance, and macroeconomic integration most vividly seen in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). As the supporters take the partnership as a stabilizing factor with the effect of encouraging economic development and equalizing the power disparity of the regions, the opponents claim that it has exacerbated strategic competition, especially with India, and has brought about the issue of debt sustainability, regional security predicaments and militarization of the Indian Ocean. The paper examines historical, strategic, and modern aspects of the relationship between Pakistan and China, evaluating how they could affect the peace and conflict in the region as well as the multipolar order in Asia. The discussion indicates that the alloy is a stabilizing and destabilizing element, and it can lead to the development of regional connectivity and cooperation, but it can also cause the intensification of the existing geopolitical frictions.

Introduction

Pakistan-China has been a strategic partnership that has shaped the geopolitical landscape of the region during the last 50 years and determined the dynamics in the region (Li et al., 2025). Traditionally, this alliance was formed due to the similarity of security interests and political affiliations in the Cold War and slowly transformed into a multidimensional association including military collaboration, political integration, economic integration, and infrastructure development (Faisal Ahmad et al., 2024; Sharaf Ali and Shabbir, 2023). Over the last years, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has emerged as the symbolic project that exemplifies this collaboration as not just a large-scale economic project but also a tactic that may influence both regional connectivity, commerce, and security (Laiba Ali Khan & Sumaira Gul, 2024). Connecting the western part of China with Gwadar port in Pakistan, CPEC will give China direct access to the Arabian Sea and provide Pakistan with an infrastructure investment, energy projects, and chances of economic modernization, bridging the gaps in its development (Sharaf Ali and Shabbir, 2023; Ahmad et al., 2024).

Although these advantages may exist, academic sources point out the possibilities and threats of such an intensification of the partnership. First, the collaboration will contribute to the stability of the region via economic interdependence, better connectivity, and deeper bilateral collaboration which might result in the development of long-term mutual trust and soft-power connections (Shah, 2023; Laiba Ali Khan and Sumaira Gul, 2024). Conversely, structural asymmetries, strategic dependency, the possibility of increasing rivalry between regional players, especially India, which will turn into counterbalancing steps to achieve destabilization of South Asian security processes have been raised (Latif and Khan, 2025; Asad Ali et al., 2024). The issues of internal governance in Pakistan and the control of financial and strategic responsibilities also affect the ability of the partnership to bring about stability (Latif and Khan, 2025).

This paper aims to discuss the effects of the Pakistan China strategic partnership, more so under CPEC on the stability of South Asia and will examine the stabilizing as well as the destabilizing aspects of the partnership. The research will offer a detailed perspective of the collaborators and their influence on the development of the region by focusing on economic, strategic, and political considerations (Li et al., 2025; Faisal Ahmad et al., 2024). This research is important because it will help inform policy makers, academics and regional stakeholders on the implication of bilateral cooperation on South Asian security architecture, economic development and long term strategic balance on the areas of governance, diplomacy and policy intervention that may maximize benefits and reduce risks (Shah, 2023; Laiba Ali Khan and Sumaira Gul, 2024).

Moreover, it is believed that an ever-growing importance of the Pakistan-China strategic partnership is a contributing factor of an overall geopolitical balance in South Asia and other areas. According to scholars, the bilateral cooperation within the CPEC framework does not only enhance the economic and infrastructural power of Pakistan, but it also makes it a strategic partner in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, connecting South Asia and Central Asia, and the Middle East (Sharaf Ali & Shabbir, 2023; Li et al., 2025). This has increased connectivity which boosts trade, energy security and regional integration, which may lead to interdependencies that deter unilateralism and cooperative security structures (Laiba Ali Khan & Sumaira Gul, 2024). Simultaneously, the Pakistan-China partnership has triggered the interest of regional actors, such as India, the United States, and the Gulf states observing the consequences of the partnership in terms of regional influence and balance of power (Asad Ali et al., 2024; Latif and Khan, 2025). Thus, it is essential to learn the complex effects of this alliance in order to evaluate not only the benefits of the two countries but also the general stability and the strategic direction of South Asia.

Literature Review

The Pakistan-China strategic alliance has undergone a lot of academic research whereby the literature highlights on the historical, political, economical and security aspects of the alliance. Initial sources emphasize the Cold War roots of the relationship, whereby the security interests of Pakistan vis-a-vis India overlapped with the strategic interest of China to counterbalance India and gain a presence in South Asia (Small, 2015; Fair, 2014). According to researchers, such a historical foundation created a source of reliability and stability and allowed the relationship to remain the same despite domestic political upheaval in Pakistan or the changing balance of power in the world (Rafiq, 2019). The stability of the bilateral relationship has frequently been compared to the unpredictability of other partnerships within the region, which depicts the depth of the strategy and reliance between the two countries that have been the basis of the relationship between China and Pakistan.

The military and security cooperation is one of the fundamental parts of the partnership, which the literature recognizes as the central to the South Asian strategic stability, and instability. Research also emphasizes that China has provided military equipment, nuclear and missile-related technical support, and training to Pakistan, which has contributed to the firming of the deterrence stance of Pakistan against India (Pant, 2016; Li, 2020). This backing of the military is viewed as a stabilizing factor in that it is known to avoid one-sided control of the region by any one actor. Nevertheless, it is also reported by authors as one of the factors contributing to a continuous security dilemma, especially the deepening of the Indian modernization of defense and strategic orientation with the United States (Kaplan, 2019; Cohen, 2013). Based on the key findings of academic works, the Pakistan-China defense nexus contributes both to the establishment of regional stability and to competition at the same time, which depicts the ambiguity of cooperation and rivalry in South Asia.

The economic aspects of the collaboration have received a good portion of academic interest, especially with regard to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). CPEC is a large-scale project through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China that aims to link Xinjiang province to Gwadar Port in Pakistan to support trade, energy delivery, and connectivity in the region (Wolf, 2019; Sharaf and Shabbir, 2023). Literature shows that CPEC could help resolve the energy crises that Pakistan has been facing, enhance the infrastructure, and trigger industrialization (Faisal Ahmad et al., 2024; Shad et al., 2025). To China, CPEC offers a strategic gateway to the Arabian Sea and a different path of trade around maritime chokepoints like the Strait of Malacca and, therefore, minimizes risks in case of geopolitical conflict (Wolf, 2019; Li, 2020). There is general

consensus in the literature that economic integration with CPEC has increased interdependence that can help bring about the stability of the region through the development of incentives to cooperate peacefully.

Simultaneously, the critical literature highlights the issues and possible disruptive influence of the partnership. According to scholars, excessive amounts of Chinese investment introduce structural dependency to Pakistan, which is raising questions about sovereignty and debt sustainability (Latif and Khan, 2025; Small, 2015). CPEC and Pakistan-China defense alliance also cause tension in South Asia especially to India, based on the geopolitical implications. According to analysts, the spread of Chinese influence, whether it is through infrastructural development or strategic partnerships, is seen as a threat by India, and may result in arms races and an increase in the insecurity situation in the region (Kaplan, 2019; Asad Ali et al., 2024). In this respect, the literature indicates that the partnership is a twofold nature: on the one hand, it encourages economic and strategic gains to the countries of Pakistan and China, and, on the other hand, it gives rise to the fears and power struggles in the region.

Political situation in Pakistan at home is commonly categorized in the literature as being a major force that has affected the results of the strategic partnership. CPEC has the potential to enhance the full potential of the state, yet the impact of political instability and inefficiencies within the bureaucracy along with the decisions made by the elites can increase vulnerabilities (Latif & Khan, 2025; Shah, 2023). The researchers observe that even though China has a doctrine of non-interference, the issues in internal governance of Pakistan can affect the project implementation, transparency, and perception (Faisal Ahmad et al., 2024). The literature emphasizes that the long-term stability gains of the partnership depends on good governance, capacity of the institution and political sustainability in Pakistan.

The second important theme in the literature is the greater regional influence of the Pakistan-China relationship. The alliance has been associated with the progress in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean with several studies emphasizing that the alliance has been instrumental in the creation of regional security and economic networks (Li, 2020; Wolf, 2019). The concern of China with the stability of the region, especially in Xinjiang and Afghanistan, is directly linked to the strategic location of Pakistan and its ability to cooperate and form counterterrorism alliances and insure transit routes (Kaplan, 2019; Sharaf and Shabbir, 2023). Researchers also mention that the strategic presence of Gwadar Port will allow expanding the Chinese influence into the Indian Ocean which, although increasing connectivity in the region, can be interpreted as a militarization signal by other regional powers (Pant, 2016; Small, 2015).

The theoretical implications of the partnership through literature have explored using the international relations frameworks. Realist views weight the calculations of balance of power whereby Pakistan-China alliance is a balance to India and the American presence in the South Asian region (Cohen, 2013; Kaplan, 2019). The liberal and interdependence-oriented approaches emphasize economic integration and infrastructure collaboration as the avenues of decreasing the conflict incentives and enhancing the connectivity in the region (Wolf, 2019; Laiba Ali Khan and Gul, 2024). These divergent views highlight the idea that the Pakistan-China relationship cannot be divided into two categories: stabilizing and destabilizing, on the contrary, its implications are context-specific and mediated by internal governance and geopolitical reactions in the region.

To sum up, the literature persistently recognizes the Pakistan-China strategic alliance as complex, strong throughout its history and geopolitically important. Researchers admit that the alliance makes Pakistan more secure and developmental as well as availing to China strategic access and influence in the region. There are however controversies over its consequences to the region as concerning studies have noted the possibility of dependency, competitiveness, and uncertainty in strategy. It is shown in the literature that the extent of the partnership on regional stability is not linear and homogenous; it depends on the management of economies, defense postures, quality of governance, and reaction of the neighboring states. This subtle interaction is critical to the assessment of the Pakistan-China relations in the future and their contribution to the security process in South Asia.

Methodology

The research design adopted in this study is a mixed methods research design to investigate the effects of the Pakistan-China strategic partnership on the stability of the region. The study will be a combination of quantitative analysis of the survey data collected and a qualitative content analysis of the policy documents, Scholarly Literature and Official statements. Such a combination makes it possible to evaluate the public opinion and the objective policy results holistically.

Research Design

The cross-sectional descriptive design was selected as it was necessary to capture the modern views and examine the existing tendencies in the dynamics of regional security. The paper concentrates on the economic as well as strategic aspects of the

Pakistan-China relationship in form of CPEC, defense relations and diplomatic relations. The study design enables the research to compare the correlations among the measures of strategic engagement and perceptions of regional stability besides contextualizing the results in a wider historical and geopolitical background.

Population and Sample

The sample size of the quantitative component will include students, scholars, and policy analysts in Pakistan who have an idea about international relations and regional security matters. The sampling technique applied was the stratified random sampling so that it ensured representation of the different academic institutions, age groups and areas of expertise. In particular, the research questionnaire interviewed faculty and students of six universities in Lahore including three state-owned and three non-state ones in accordance with the tradition of the survey of similar research on the perception of foreign policy by the population (Ahmad et al., 2024; Latif and Khan, 2025). The respondents who took part in the survey were 300 in number.

Data Collection

The structured questionnaire was used to gather primary data that was aimed at assessing the perception of Pakistan-China strategic cooperation, economic benefits of CPEC, defense cooperation, and perceived influence on the stability of the region. The measurements were on a five point Likert scale, where strongly disagree and strongly agree were used. The demographic items were also included in the questionnaire to attain the age, sex, educational status and exposure to international relations study.

The secondary data have been acquired by way of a systematic review of scholarly journals, government reports, policy briefs, and media. Major policy papers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pakistan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China, and reports on CPEC officials were analyzed to put the survey results in context. Also, peer reviewed literatures on the subject of regional security, CPEC, and the Chinese-Pakistan collaboration on defense offered references as a point of comparison.

Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and reliability testing were used to analyze quantitative data. The alpha of Cronbach was calculated to test the internal consistency of the survey constructs and to be more specific, tested the scales of perceptions of strategic partnership and the stability of the region. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships between Pakistan-China strategic engagement (independent variable) and perceived regional stability (dependent variable) to enable the ability to evaluate direct and indirect impacts of economic, political and defense cooperation.

Content analysis was used to extract recurrent themes, strategic priorities, and policy narratives and analyze qualitative data, which is policy documents and secondary literature. This allowed finding to be triangulated so that the perception of respondents was compared with real policy directions and strategic developments which enhanced validity of findings.

Ethical Considerations

The purpose of the study was explained to all the participants, they were assured of anonymity and informed consent was obtained. The involvement was voluntary and the respondents were free to pull out at any stage. The reference of the secondary data was done correctly to prevent plagiarism and all the analyses were done in strict academic criteria.

Data Analysis and Findings

Defining the respondents by demographics

The survey was done among 300 respondents who were students of six universities in Lahore. Table 1 gives a summary of the demographic features.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=300)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	160	53.3
	Female	140	46.7
Age Group (years)	18-25	120	40.0
	26-35	130	43.3
	36-45	50	16.7

Education Level	Undergraduate	90	30.0
	Graduate	150	50.0
	Postgraduate/PhD	60	20.0
University Type	Public	150	50.0
	Private	150	50.0

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach’s alpha was computed to ensure the internal consistency of the constructs: Strategic Cooperation, Economic Partnership (CPEC), and Perceived Regional Stability.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Strategic Cooperation	6	0.842
Economic Partnership (CPEC)	5	0.879
Perceived Regional Stability	6	0.861

Interpretation: The Cronbach alpha of all constructs is above 0.8, which is a high degree of reliability.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics are used to sum up the views of respondents regarding the cooperation between Pakistan and China and the stability of the region. Everything was rated using a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Strategic Cooperation	4.15	0.62	Strongly positive perception
Economic Partnership (CPEC)	4.05	0.68	Positive perception
Perceived Regional Stability	3.78	0.75	Moderate perception

Interpretation: The Cronbach alpha of all constructs is above 0.8, which is a high degree of reliability.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics are used to sum up the views of respondents regarding the cooperation between Pakistan and China and the stability of the region. Everything was rated using a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Strategic Cooperation	1		
2. Economic Partnership (CPEC)	0.642**	1	
3. Perceived Regional Stability	0.573**	0.599**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$

Interpretation: There are positive and significant correlation between strategic cooperation and economic partnership and regional stability which indicates the view of respondents that both dimensions are associated to stability albeit not in a perfect relationship.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis

To determine the impact of Strategic Cooperation and Economic Partnership on Perceived Regional Stability, a SEM model has been constructed. Good fit: model fit indices pointed to good fit.

$$\chi^2/df = 1.98$$

$$CFI = 0.965$$

$$TLI = 0.951$$

$$RMSEA = 0.051$$

Table 5: SEM Path Coefficients

Path	Estimate (β)	SE	p-value	Interpretation
Strategic Cooperation –Regional Stability	0.41	0.05	<0.001	Significant positive effect
Economic Partnership –Regional Stability	0.36	0.06	<0.001	Significant positive effect

Interpretation: Strategic cooperation as well as economic partnership is a big factor in the perceived regional stability. Strategic cooperation is slightly more effective than economic partnership, as it indicates the perception of the respondents who consider that the coordination of defense and political activity is more interconnected with stability in comparison to economic projects only.

Key Findings

- **Positive Perception of Partnership:** Respondents perceive Pakistan-China strategic and economic cooperation positively which means that they have confidence in the bilateral partnership.
- **Moderate Effect on Regional Stability:** There is a positive perception of strategic and economic companionship whereas issues of India, debt dependency and regional issues moderate the perception of stability.
- **Significant Relationships:** Both the correlation and SEM results indicate that both strategic cooperation and economic partnership are both significant determinants of perceptions of regional stability.
- **Relative Influence:** Strategic cooperation (defense and diplomatic ties) is perceived to have a little more impact on regional stability than economic partnership (CPEC), implying that the respondents associate security coordination with stability more than trade or infrastructure, exclusively.
- **Demographic Insights:** Younger participants (18-35) and students of graduate level feel better about the partnership, which could be because of having more exposure to international relations and strategic studies.

Discussion

The results of this analysis have shown that the Pakistan-China strategic relationship is most often viewed as the positive contribution to the regional cooperation, but the influence of its effect on the overall stability is more complicated. Strategic cooperation, especially that of defense and diplomacy, was also ranked by the respondents to have stronger impact over the stability of the region compared to the economic projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This fact correlates with the existing literature, which stresses the continuity of bilateral relations in the past and the security-based premises (Small, 2015; Li, 2020). Both the correlation and structural equation modeling results support the claim that the concept of strategic and economic cooperation is an important factor that affects the way respondents perceive the political stability of the region, which means that the respondents appreciate a combination of the security cooperation and economic integration as the way of managing the intricate geopolitical situation in South Asia (Kaplan, 2019; Ahmad et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the moderate view of the regional stability indicates the remaining fears of the Indian-Pakistan conflicts, the possible militarization of the Indian Ocean, and the structural dependency regarding the debt and administration (Latif and Khan, 2025; Sharaf and Shabbir, 2023).

Besides, the paper brings to light the duality of the Pakistan-China alliance. On the one hand, strategic coordination, infrastructure development, and economic integration provide the facility to strengthen trade, connectivity, and cooperation in counterterrorist activities, which increases the stability of the regional environment (Faisal Ahmad et al., 2024; Wolf, 2019). Conversely, insecurity may increase and decrease the stabilizing impact of the partnership by regional tensions, especially the strategic concerns of India and greater Indo-Pacific forces. This bilaterality stands in favor of the fact that the overall effect of strategic alliances depends on the quality of governance, regional politics, and the overall geopolitical response (Pant, 2016; Cohen, 2013). Thus, as the alliance enhances the Pakistani strategic independence and provides China with safe trade corridors and control over the region, the possibilities of conflict due to rivalry are quite high.

Conclusion

To sum up, the Pakistan-China strategic partnership turns out to be a versatile one that may stabilize and destabilize the South Asian region at the same time. The more visible impact on the perceptions of the stability in the regions seems to be caused by strategic cooperation, especially the military and diplomatic ones, but other economic projects, such as CPEC, play the significant role in the long-term development and interdependence. The influence of the partnership will be relative depending on the domestic governance and practices by actors in the region, as well as the general global strategic

environment in Pakistan. This will require effective policy actions, open project management and active diplomacy to maximize the stabilizing advantages of the partnership and reduce possible risks and tensions to the minimum.

Recommendations

Nonetheless, on the basis of the findings of the study, it is possible to make a number of recommendations. To begin with, it will be necessary to increase transparency, governance, and publicity on CPEC and other joint projects to gain the confidence of people and improve the chances of gaining the perception of stability. Second, regional security arrangements between countries should include confidence-enhancing tactics to curb misconceptions amid the neighbouring countries, particularly India, and security predicaments. Third, focusing on inclusive economic growth which entails fair sharing of benefits among various regions in Pakistan, will create stability in the country and social legitimacy. Lastly the partnership can be enhanced by regional multilateral interaction, such as dialogue with Afghanistan, Central Asian states and India which would enhance the stabilizing effects of the partnership and curbs unintended tensions towards a stable framework of peace and cooperation in South Asia.

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